BIRD GOSSIP

HARRIETTE WILBUR

To
Agnes Kennedy.
From
Donald Dallas

Miss Delahunty

From

VI-1 Class 1924

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

GOLDFINCH

BIRD GOSSIP

By

HARRIETTE WILBUR

WITH TWENTY-EIGHT
ILLUSTRATIONS IN COLOR

PHILADELPHIA
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Bird Gossip

I

THE BIRD OF LEISURE

THE cedar waxwing from birth onward takes life more leisurely than any other bird. Perhaps that is why his plumage is never ruffled nor his topknot awry, no matter how the winds blow.

As a baby, he is very quiet and confiding, and will endure handling without alarm or resentment. In manners he is a model of politeness, and though a great wanderer, takes time to keep every delicate feather on his shapely body smoothed into place with exquisite care. And no bird enjoys an after-dinner nap better than he.

I remember sitting one July afternoon for over an hour on a park bench watching two waxwings perched on the extreme tip-top of closely adjacent balsam firs. In all that time they barely moved. They merely sat there, basking in the warm sunshine, stretching a wing or a leg, or turning a head now and then, and, when peering down at passers-by, raising their crests cockatoo-like. Other birds were flying busily and noisily about, but there they sat with nothing to do and nothing to say, to other ears at least. They may have been planning

their nest, and they may have been whispering sweet secrets to each other, in lisps too soft for other ears.

It was an endurance test for me, but I was determined to outstay them. They were aware of my presence, for I was in plain sight, and through the glasses could see them turn their wise-looking black-rimmed spectacles down upon me inquiringly. But they were merely indifferent as to who I was and what I was doing there, unless they were flattered by my attention and were willing to be admired as long as I cared to remain.

At any rate, trusting to their high perch and their deft wings, they sat there for more than an hour. To be exact, it was seventy-five minutes from the time I drew my watch on them until they flew away, and I did not think to look at my watch until I had been observing them some moments.

At last, though I heard no debate on the subject, they agreed to shift perches, and spreading their wings in unison, as two birds operated by one mind, they flew silently and softly over to alight on two neighboring firs a short distance away. As I didn't have another hour to spend on them, I promptly arose and went my way.

Who can blame them for being such mannikins, when they are at their best posed in the sunlight? There is something so trim and soldierly about their manner, shoulders back, heads up, with topknots like martial helmets. And what bird anywhere wears a more military-appearing uniform, than their soft faun-toned khaki, lit up with touches of gold and red? Each seems an officer, clad in plumage of matchless delicacy and silky softness, its browns and purples glistening in the

sunshine, ornamented with bars of black and yellow, and medals of coral-red.

He is an ideal soldier, too, for no one takes better care of his uniform than cedar bird. He makes his toilet with the most scrupulous care, and every feather of his well-fitting coat and fine crest is smoothed until it is immaculate. I have watched a bird spend a good half-hour on his toilet, and when he left his pine-top dressing-room, he seemed to have stepped from a band-box.

Though so gaily clad, and classed with the chatterer family, the waxwing is really the Quaker of birddom. A company of them sitting solemnly in the trees is much like the old-fashioned Quaker meeting, with the congregation silently waiting for the "spirit to move them." And they never have any song-service either, as though they believed it a sin to sing or to indulge in any musical entertainment. In Canada the bird is often called recollet, a Latin word meaning "an attitude for religious contemplation."

They combine sociability and silence, companionship and self-contemplation, in a marked degree. A soft, sibilant whisper, as though drawing their breath, or sighing over the subject of their reflections, and a faint, plaintive call of "pee-et," is all one ever hears from their velvety black chins.

Even when engaged in the serious business of foraging for food, they act with regulated, military precision. One morning, while in the same park, I sat for some time on the bank of the stream, where the water rippled over the stones with a pretty murmur before plunging down a short fall. It was one of those muggy June

mornings when midges are plenty, and I had to keep fanning them away to be comfortable.

In the trees each side of the creek were waxwings, a dozen or more of them, each occupying a separate branch. They were proving that their classification in the same family as the fly-snappers and fly-catching thrushes is not an ornithological error, for they were catching their food on the wing. It was no prosaic performance, either, but had the appearance of an old-time Virginia Reel.

Each bird would wing its way sedately and as if at command, out over the middle of the stream, sweep up or down for a midge, and with a quick about-face, return to his chosen perch. Meanwhile another bird, perhaps from the opposite side of the creek, would take his turn to the center and back, and at times several would be flying out and returning at the same time, making it a series of loops and turns most fascinating to watch.

I saw the same bird make one flight after another out over the water and back, and he did it with an unvarying routine which would have been monotonous had there not been the curves the other birds traced in the air to lend diversion to his festoons. If those flights could have left lines in the air what an intricate maze they would have traced!

And as this was going on some distance up the creek, the dainty bodies being clearly outlined against the blue sky rift between the green firs edging the creek, it was an exercise in rhythm savoring little of eating.

It was all done so quietly that had I not seen the birds, I would not have suspected their presence. No

confusion, no shrieks of battle or shouts of victory,—just a poem of curves and dashes and waves,—a silent song in motion.

The cedar waxwing is common in the north, for though being a great wanderer,—a globe-trotter, not a tramp, however—and satisfied with nothing less than all of temperate North America for ranging, these handsome rovers love best to dwell among the pines, firs, and cedar thickets. Our parks and country waysides are favored spots, as these birds are not only sociable among themselves, but like the company of mankind as well.

Occasionally they are open roadside birds. I remember taking a three-mile walk along a lake-shore road. At intervals all the way cedar birds decorated the scenery, perched on the fence-posts as fearlessly as so many brown leaves, or crossing the road ahead of me with their characteristic easy, undulating flight, ended by a few turns just above the perch before sitting down. Just why a group of them, topping many fence-posts on one side of the road as I came by, should all lift their wings like so many brown leaves whirled by a saucy breeze, and drift across the road in front of me, over my head, or behind me, and take perches on as many posts on the opposite side of the road, I could not decide. For vanity? For sociability? For curiosity?

For all they are such quiet birds, they usually choose a conspicuous perch in the upper branches of trees, where they may see and be seen. They dislike being alone, and always appear in companies. Even one sitting alone on a post or telephone pole will have a mate somewhere within whispering distance.

But the bird is not always staid and quiet. Friends of mine tell me of being out at their summer cottage one December day, during a snowstorm, when the big white flakes were floating lightly and gently down. From the window they watched a small flock of waxwings entertaining themselves by flying out from their evergreen perches to catch the flakes. They might have mistaken the flakes for great white moths, but seemed to know them for what they were, since the same bird flew out again and again from his own special perch to catch a flake that he must soon have learned would literally "melt in his mouth," without leaving any food-taste whatsoever.

My sister, writing from Iowa, tells me of watching some cedar birds, not usually seen in that locality, play with apple-blossoms that were blowing down from the trees. Perhaps it is this playful habit which causes some timid fruit-growers to think the bird eats fruit blossoms, and so damages the apples and cherries.

Last summer some friends had a waxwing family for near neighbors. On August 20th, a pair were discovered repairing an abandoned thrush-nest near the cottage. Their repairs consisted mainly in filling the nest to overflowing with the fresh white down of fireweed, and as this silk was not then plentiful, they spent some days at it, so happy that they whispered and lisped and even whistled squeakily as they worked.

Were they a pair of young birds prematurely mated, or old birds that had met with unfortunate household troubles during their first attempt, or a pair that, having safely reared one brood, were tempted by their

knowledge of our beautiful summery Septembers to try again? At any rate, in due time two little bluish-white, black freckled eggs appeared in the downy mattress, whereas the usual brood numbers four to six eggs, and is deposited somewhat earlier in the season.

The mother sat on the eggs for two weeks, with her mate in close but silent attention from some near-by lookout. Whenever approached, the male would give a peculiar, beady "tseep," and his mate was instantly alert. She would sit close, her crest depressed and her neck straightened up to resemble a dead stick or leaf-stem. When she did decide to leave, which she did if her unwelcome visitors came too near, she did not utter a sound when flying away.

But when the visitors kept to the path, which was within seven feet of the nest, the brooding mother had no fear of them, and did not change her expression while looking them straight in the eye.

The young that hatched out were hideous little creatures,—blind, naked, and perfectly helpless, with great round stomachs that made them look like deformed paper-weights. They were always crawling about the cradle, resting upon their pot-bellies and using both wings and legs for support. They were hungry all the time, and one parent was in constant attendance, standing over a youngster and pumping it full of insects and fruit.

Until the little ones were able to leave the nest the mother hovered over them at night. My friend wished a picture of her, and tried a flash-light. He wanted the bird awake, and so tired was she from her day's work,—

though some might call it merely laziness, for such is the bird's reputation among many,—he stood close to the nest and whistled her awake before she would draw her head from under her wing.

The youngsters were not permitted to suffer because of the unusual lateness of the nesting, and had donned their pretty soft-gray coats and spotted vests (without the family jewels, however) when the equinoctial storms came. All through those long, cold, rainy days and nights, the parents divided the work of foraging and hovering, one always being on the nest while the other gathered food. But they survived the deluge, and soon thereafter the family "folded up their tents like the Arabs and as silently stole away," to join a band of their gypsy-friends and wander the winter woods in search of cedar berries and other such food.

II

THE THIMBLE NEST

One day, late in May, while bird-studying in a small oak grove, I heard a humming-bird buzzing about. Using my glasses, I soon discovered a male ruby-throat gathering lichens from one of the trees a couple of rods or so away. He tore off a bit of the ruffled edge, and flew away with it. I watched the direction of his flight, but soon lost sight of the tiny elf in the foliage.

So I turned about that I might keep the oak tree in sight, and screened myself behind some hazel brush. There was still a good bit of the lichen tuft left, and I doubted if Sir Ruby-Throat had taken his last of it. I was right, for soon the little fellow was back for another bit. And this time I discovered his destination.

On a near-by horizontal oak twig, about shoulder high and but half an inch in diameter, was a tiny structure which had more the appearance of a knot on the limb, or of an acorn-cup balanced there, than a nest. It was of a peculiar dazzling white, however, and looked as though it might have been made of cotton-batting. I found afterward it was mostly made of down from the seeds of the necklace poplar, matted and packed to a firm soft felt. The tiny beak of the mother had beaten and pressed the down about her own little body, as she

worked, for it had the shape of having been modeled against a warm, loving mother-breast.

What was my surprise, as ruby-throat flew in, to see a black needle-like beak flash over the edge of the nest. It was Lady Green-Sleeves herself, busying herself on the inside.

This was interesting. I had read that ornithologists believe the male hummer does not assist in building the nest. Now was a chance to test the assertion. I got my glasses focused in a twinkling, and studied every move made by either bird. The male pressed the lichen in at the base of the nest, accommodatingly standing in profile as he worked, and thus giving me the best view possible of him. Next he seized a minute bit of cobweb dangling from the nest edge, and seemed to wrap it over and about the lichen, and to tamp with his beak against or into the felt. Then, after a faint squeak to his mate, who had peered over all the while watching every move he made, he flew swiftly away toward the oak.

Whereupon the mother settled back into the nest, and nothing was seen of her except her long beak until her mate burred in again on his throbbing wings, when she rose sufficiently to look down at him, and even tweaked a bit at the felt on the edge of the nest to improve its appearance.

All the afternoon I watched that nest, and by the time I left the spot the whole of the white cup had been stuccoed over with lichen bits so thickly that it was no longer a prominent object on the twig, but a mere wart of bark, or a well-rooted lichen colony. He had packed the transplanted lichens well around the base, and up and down

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RUBY-THROATED HUMMINGBIRD

wherever any of the felting could show. A little fringe of it stuck decoratively up all around the edge of the nest, thus adding to the deception. It was a work of art as a cradle, even if the finishing touches had been put on by the father.

It was all the work of ruby-throat, this lichen stucco finish, for the only assistance he got from his mate was the encouraging looks she bent upon him as he worked, and the microscopic cheep with which she directed his efforts. At least, all the lichen trimmings I saw put on the nest that day were his work, and as far as I could ascertain it was the work of but one bird, although Lady Green-Sleeves may have done something at it previously.

Finally, along in the afternoon, the mother left the nest. As soon as both birds were gone I hurried over to examine the thimble outside and in. I was surprised to see two tiny eggs in it, no larger than good-sized peas, and of that remarkable translucence which only a pearl or a humming-bird's egg can possess. As two is the number given in all bird books, I decided that the mother had found it necessary to commence brooding before the nest was finished. No doubt the first egg had been deposited while the felting was still being built up, and as soon as the cup was completed she had started incubating, leaving her mate to put on the decorative, though necessary, camouflage.

III

THE NEEDLES IN THE ROSE-BUSH

Could a humming-bird select a more fitting site for its dainty thimble-nest than a rose-bush? The gem of all nests in the gem of all plants! My neighbor discovered it and called me to admire, and henceforth we counted ourselves favored by Dame Nature. For a hummer's nest is nearly as hard to find as that pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow, and when one does chance to lay eyes on the tiny thimble which the bird makes for a cradle, one will gladly dispense with fairy-gold. And to have such a nest in one's own front yard,—that is a favor indeed.

For several days we had noticed a pair of humming-birds about the flowers, and had studied the dainty creatures with delight. But that they had designs on the rose-bush never entered our minds. One day, however, my friend noticed a male ruby-throat sitting on an ash-branch about a rod from the rose-bush, apparently no more alive than a stuffed bird. She trained her glasses on him, and watched. For an hour or more he sat there, with scarcely the lift of a feather or the blink of an eye. What could he be doing, loafing there so idly? She was determined to find out, and finally her

patience was rewarded. He flew down into the rose-bush, and there, in a tiny lichen thimble, sat Dame Ruby-Throat, brooding!

Every day thereafter, we were sure to see Goodman Ruby-Throat in the ash-tree, almost any hour we glanced his way. And that he was keeping good watch of his little mate was very certain, since one had but to approach that rose-bush to start him buzzing and squeaking about one's ears.

Ten days after we found the nest the two birds were flying in and out, in and out, bringing food to a pair of long black needles which kept lifting themselves over the edge of the nest. When I went over and got a glimpse of the babies I nearly shrieked, they were so very ugly. Just thrust a pin through a tiny tuft of cotton batting, and you have a working model of a newly-hatched humming-bird. How the tiny body, no larger than a honey-bee, ever lifts up such an enormous beak, nearly an inch long, for food, is a marvel. No wonder the eggs must be nearly twice as large around one way as the other,—that budding bill needs room.

The feeding was rather trying to watch, being, as Mr. Torrey says in one of his books, "a frightful looking act." I could never see anything in the parent's beak, such as a dangling bug or worm or berry, but whenever one of them flew in, it surely brought food with it, for as soon as the parent alighted on the edge of the crib, and a tiny black needle would come up to greet it, wide-open and urgent, the parent would push its beak into the gaping youngster and pump food into it. I always held my breath for fear the tiny nestling would become

impaled on the parent's beak, but it never did, and was always as good as new for the next feeding.

After a week or more of such care the little ones were decidedly larger, a good two inches in length from beak-tip to the stumpy tail, and were feathered much like the mother, though less metallic and with considerable down ruffling their plumage. It seems to be the rule that nestlings shall fly before they are matured, just as human babies walk while they are still practically helpless. Young hummers, like other nestlings, have to acquire fullness of plumage and trimness of build on the wing, as it were. Nature knows they need wing-power more than beautiful plumage, or graceful form, and sees that most of the food which they receive goes to developing wing muscles. It is remarkable, too, that the birds fed on food partly digested by the parents fly before those fed on whole food. No doubt the half-digested, pulpy insects are more quickly assimilated, and so growth is forced.

One day the nestlings were out on the branch when I arrived for my daily inspection, and the parents were nearly crazy with having both to feed and to be present should one of the darlings get blown away like the whiff of down it was. And when one of them tried a short experimental flight to an adjoining branch about a yard from the home twig, the delight, or frenzy, of the mother was almost pathetic, it was so keen. She accompanied the little one all the way, shrieking with joy, or with fear, whichever she felt, and when it was safely landed, she flew around and around it like a buzzing windmill. Then back she must go to comfort the beak-heavy little

mite on the home twig, threatening each instant to follow its older brother.

The next day, when I went to call, the family was apparently gone, although as my friend had hummingbird visitors about her flowers the rest of the summer, no doubt the birds did not go far away.

IV

THE BIRD WITH THE MEDAL

WHENEVER I see a meadowlark posed full in the sunlight on some prominent perch,—a clod, a stone, a shock of grain, a fence-post, a bush, or a telephone pole, whatever is handy just so it elevates him into plain sight, I wonder how he came by the medal he so proudly displays, with commands for one and all to "See! See! O see what I have on!"

Perhaps he was a bold knight who asked to be changed into a bird that he might wear his lady's colors forever. Perhaps he was a poor minstrel who appeared in some hall of song and bore away the prize. Perhaps, because of the faithfulness with which he keeps asserting "Spring o' the Year" from bare frozen fields, April decorated him with her own sunshine and shadow colors,—for he is a feathered Joshua marching round and round and blowing his silver trumpet, or rather flute, until the snow walls fall and spring takes possession. Perhaps he won his medal in some insect-destroying contest, and wears it as a warning and a reproof to those short-sighted tillers of the soil who, for sport or prejudice, would destroy such a valuable ally. At any rate, wherever a meadowlark is seen, he will be proudly showing off his decoration, like a small boy with a nickel watch and chain. Perhaps this is the legend: "There

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MEADOWLARK

was once a small boy who had a watch and chain, and was so vain of it before those who had none, that for punishment he was turned into a bird." Although, boy-like, he adapted himself to his punishment and became one of the happiest beings under the shining sun.

I have always been fond of Master Meadowlark, he is such a companionable bird. Year after year we children welcomed his "Spring o' the Year" yodel, and trudged along an Iowa country road to and from school to his mischievous chant of "I see—see—I see your petticoat!" as he stood craning at us with his head uplifted shoulder-high in the grass of the near-by pasture, or hailed us with the same saucy taunt from a higher fence-post. This pasture, or river meadow, was a favorite playground which the birds generously shared with us if we kept a respectful distance, and there we learned many interesting things about the habits of our feathered playmates. One day in early spring, when the ground was thawing on the sunny slope and the new grass was just sprouting, we noticed several meadowlarks doing something curious. They would stand a short time with their heads close to the ground, beaks thrust into the soft earth; then they would lift their heads, take a step or two, and bury their bills again. We followed them, and found many little wells in the soft earth, as though a lead-pencil had been poked into the ground at random scores of times. We decided the birds were drinking, but since then have accepted the explanation of such borings by the western meadowlark as a search for buried locust eggs. So doubtless they were feeding on some favorite insect food, although it

was too early for any locusts to be awake. If he begins feeding on such pests before they can get a-wing, he deserves a still larger medal.

The spring I taught my first term of country school I learned to know one meadowlark family quite intimately. For a week or two one of the mischievous medalists had been practicing his piccolo on the roadside fence of the river-bottom meadow every morning and afternoon as I passed by. There he would sit, on a certain post near a dogwood clump, in enraptured ecstasy, head raised and beak pointed skyward, running over a phrase of long sliding notes poured from a full round throat and with a breath control a prima donna might envy. It was his well-known spring yodel,—a clear, ringing, flute-like whistle repeated over and over without the slightest variation of time, tune or pitch, with a short rhetorical pause between phrases. Meadowlark-like, he continued to practice long after he had reached perfection. One morning, to see what he would do, I mimicked him. He dropped his head and glanced about.

"Quit! quit!" he sputtered to himself, twitching his tail nervously. Then, his trance broken, he turned his back and, flashing miniature lightnings of indignation from his white tail feathers, he dived into the grass. He crept out of sight like a flustered field-mouse, but even after he had disappeared, I could hear him scolding musically to himself.

By afternoon, he had recovered, and was practicing away as heartily as ever. I mimicked him again; he cocked his ear, but didn't fly away, and when I called a second time, he located the source of the disturbance.

He looked me over, then flew to the next post farther on, and sang again. But in shifting posts, he had changed songs, this one being two notes short and with a questioning lift at the close.

Soon we were good friends, and he often flew on ahead of me, from post to post for some little distance beyond the dogwood. Usually he would sing the same song all the way, but occasionally he would change keys, or end a phrase abruptly, or vary the closing with a chuckle just loud enough to be heard. Sometimes he sang while on the wing, too. When he left me he always flew back toward his favorite post, so one Saturday morning I looked for the nest.

It took me two hours to locate it, although it was a scant twenty-five feet from the dogwood. And the way I happened to discover it was unexpected. My plan was to take a few steps, then look for anything that appeared unusual. In this way my eyes were attracted by a slight depression in the fresh grass, like a faint, trampled pathway. It was over a foot in length, and ended abruptly in a tuft of grass beside a stone. I stooped to investigate, and looked into the bright eyes of a brooding meadowlark. She sat close for an instant, then sprang from the nest with an alarmed "Quit, quit, t-t-t-t-t!" and ran down the little path for a few steps while getting under way for her quail-like spring into the air. Her mate, who had lingered about the dogwood suspicious and quiet, joined her, and they flew away, tut-tutting to each other, and left the nest to me.

There were four eggs, white with purplish-brown signatures around the larger end, resting on a soft grassy

bed. The architect and builder had evidently burrowed into the tuft carefully, down far enough to leave the arched, matted dome undisturbed, and up far enough to give it a well-carpeted floor, showing that the mother was as much of an artist as her mate, or perhaps it was the skill and labor of both which had produced such a cradle, since calls at the nest at odd times often found the father brooding while the mother ranged and exercised, proving his interest in domestic affairs.

The young that hatched out a week later were ugly beings indeed,—lumpish, squabby, over-large, clad in ragged, scanty brownish-gray canton-flannel pyjamas, and equipped with long flesh-colored beaks lined with bright red. For several days they were blinded by a thin opaque membrane over each eye. Until they could see, they seemed unconscious of my presence, but when they got their sight, and began to scramble out of their dugout cradle, they would show fear and resentment at my approach in a unique manner. Each one would lie close to the ground with its eyes closed, its covering of mixed down and feathers bristled, its head drawn back between its shoulders, and pressed closely to the breast. And in place of a harmless young bird would be a good imitation of a defiant box tortoise. If touched, they would creep off to hide in a grass tuft.

All through June the babies were feathering out, and getting more "handy with their feet." As their feathers grew, they became smaller proportionately, and more shapely and trim and meadowlarkish. When school was out for the summer they were already practicing the family whistle, although it sounded more like a small

boy's attempts than like their father's full, round, long-drawn fife-notes. But Nature rewarded their efforts at piping on the family flute by hanging faint copies of the heirloom locket about their necks, until such time as they would be worthy of a better. And as their father had almost stopped singing altogether with their advent, to help keep the larder supplied, and they had only the remembrance of that glorious music which had seeped through their shells during those long May days for copy, they did very well indeed.

Before they could fly they had acquired the pretty, characteristic family manner of stepping daintily along with the head held high in the air and the chest out, like a trained pedestrian. They were good walkers before they could lift themselves from the ground.

Perhaps the meadowlark's power of flight seems limited because he really prefers walking to flying. For he is much more graceful afoot than a-wing. In flight the body of the full-grown bird seems too heavy and his wings too short for prolonged and rapid movement. He appears to rise from the ground with difficulty, like a young, inexperienced bird. Once under way he goes straight ahead, with alternate wing-pulses and short distances of sailing. His flight is individual, in its bee-line course and in the rapid and intermittent wing-beats, more suitable to a smaller bird, as the rule is the larger the bird the slower the wing-beat. These four young pedestrians fairly obliterated the pathway to their cradle and sleeping quarters with their constant tramping about; on the last visit I paid them they were dodging here and there over the family estate, playing tag

and running races as merrily as so many light-hearted boys.

The next spring I was attending school, rooming just across the campus and but a few doors from a road that skirted a meadow. And every morning for weeks I was entertained by a certain meadowlark that sang loud and long from a telephone pole across the street. Sometimes he came to this favored spot for an evening song as well. A day that opens and closes with a meadowlark's song cannot go wholly wrong,—there is so much of benediction in the way he mounts the highest conspicuous perch he can find, and lifts his face skyward. The fervor of his intonation makes one perforce look up; his whole posture and manner bids one stand and lift the heart in unison with his voice. One June, as we motored every morning and evening along a road by a lake, a meadowlark was to be seen standing on the peak of a stone-heap in the center of a vacant lot, singing at the top of his voice. The lot was grown up to a mass of long-stemmed buttercups, and with this golden carpet, and the rosy sky for ceiling, and the blue lake for a drop-curtain, it was a recital hall worthy the artist.

But the bird is at his best in North Dakota, in August. A river meadow or rolling pasture or a bit of lake-shore serves very well, but he is a bird of free air and vast spaces, and far-reaching prairies. I have heard him sing there, in May, when it seemed his voice must strike against the Rockies themselves. Posed on a weather-beaten, prosaic fence-post, or on a clod or weed if no higher perch be available, with the yellow sunshine that is beaming down upon the growing wheat-crop concen-

trated on his ample bosom, and lifting his soul in a song brimful of golden melody, he is North Dakota in miniature,—resourceful, vigorous, full of youth and enthusiasm and wide aspirations. And at harvest-time, with an added dignity and repose due to the cares of parenthood just experienced, he takes his ease on a bundle of golden grain, or on some post overlooking a vast stretch of pedestrian shocks stalking along toward the distant horizon,—the embodiment of well-earned content. Like the farmer, he stands there, arms akimbo, estimating the yield per acre. And considering the numberless insect pests and noxious weed seeds of all sorts he has thrust down baby throats or made way with himself, no other individual, except the farmer, has a better right to the field.

"You should see him in California," adds a friend who has spent some years there, "for the western variety of the bird is by far the finer songster. His song is a rich, musical, flute-like cadenza of eight or ten notes, with intricate trills and delicate grace-notes which, in quality and quantity, far surpass that of the eastern bird. If you could put California's sapphire skies, crystal-clear air, gorgeous blossoms, rushing mountain streams, and magnificent distances into a rippling measure of sound, you would have his song. Or songs, rather; for I have heard the same bird sing half-a-dozen different tunes, and other birds with special phrases of their own. It has been estimated that the California meadowlark has a repertory of thirty and more different tunes. He seems inspired by the rare uplifting ozone of far-reaching mesas, while the carrying quality of the clear air

adds immensely to the effect of his naturally sweet voice. In color he differs somewhat from the eastern bird; he had minted more of California's gold into the earth-brown of his coat, and so is a sunnier and brighter bird.

"He seems to be less timid out there, too. With true western hospitality he makes you welcome, tells you he is glad you have come, and puts himself out to give you pleasure. He will fly before you as you drive along a country road, sometimes for a mile or more, if your speed be reasonable, escorting you on your way with a good-will message. He will sing merrily from some perch with head raised skyward, to all appearances oblivious of human presence. But when you have come up to him, he spreads his wings and with a 'follow me' flirt of his gleaming tail feathers, and warbling as he goes, he spurts ahead, and a few rods farther on there he is again, on a fence-post or stone or bush, waiting for you to catch up and encouraging you with a song. I know no other bird that so pursues one with music as the California meadowlark; I heard one singing daily for weeks in a San Diego park, as genial and fearless as a robin. He loves the society of mankind, and chooses to live on a perch by the side of the road, and dispense music freely. However, his geniality deserts him when approached too closely; let a human being take the initiative, and he is as shy as he has been bold. At least, until he learns to know you. I always thought that after a few days my San Diego friend had a special song for me."

A meadowlark is a meadowlark, wherever found, it seems, which is one of his best traits, and makes him

admirable in every respect. One enthusiast believing his medal is honestly come by, proposes him for our national bird, because in the first place his breeding range covers the whole United States; in the second place the bird is so abundant everywhere as to be well-known; third, in form and color and mannerisms he is unique, and therefore readily distinguished from all other birds, even near kin; fourth, he is an insect-destroyer of the first rank and so of practical value to the farmer; fifth, as a songster he ranks high, some writers giving the western bird first place among native song-birds; sixth, he is a true American because he does not claim family relationship with any bird outside the western hemisphere.

V

A PRIVATE PANTRY

One afternoon early in July I went out into the pasture with Callie, the ten-year-old boy friend who often goes nature-studying with me. We were walking slowly along the cowpath at the edge of the pasture when I noticed something peculiar on the fence.

On two different barbs were impaled dead grasshoppers. At once I stopped to investigate. Each barb was made of two bits of wire, two points standing up and two down, forming an X about the foundation wire. One of these barbs held a living grasshopper, and on the neighboring barb were two of the insects, dead, one on each upstanding point. It looked interesting. Surely grasshoppers do not impale themselves in rows on barb wires, nor do their mourning relatives dispose of them thus when they die.

"What is it?" I asked Callie, who in spite of his youth is usually all-wise in riddles such as this.

"Don't know," he confessed at length, with all the air of longing to explain the mystery if he could only think of any reason, however improbable. I have learned to take Callie's explanations with a question mark, since he is apt to coin information that he cannot prove, un-

less I am critical. But this time he was frankly without a guess.

So we sat down a respectful distance to watch those barbs, promising never to take our eyes off that fence until some explanation was forthcoming. But at last mine had just shifted momentarily from the spot, when Callie muttered in my ear:

"A-ha! There he is!"

Immediately I glanced back, and there on the adjoining fence-post was a bluish ash bird, trim in white vest, but wearing a white patch on the back of his coat, and scowling out from under heavy black brigandish eyebrows.

"A white-rumped shrike!" I named him at once, remembering the description I had read just the day before. One will often find the indoor study of ornithological books of field value. The knowledge that there is such and such a bird known and named and common to the vicinity will often be of help when it is met face to face for the first time.

He had a grasshopper in his beak, and seemed to be looking over his larder, switching his tail nervously all the while. We were watching intently, wondering what he would do with the insect. But he appeared satisfied with the store, for with a muffled "peemp, peemp!" through his closed beak, he dropped down to within eighteen inches of the ground, and then, with strong, even flight, followed the fence to a second post, suddenly arose and perched an instant there, looked back at his cupboard, and with a second downward swoop flew off toward a single willow a few rods away. As he went

we had a good view of his coloration, the gray and black and white of his costume elegant in its simplicity and richness, unrelieved by any tinge of the browns and reds and yellows that so many birds are fond of donning as a cap or bow or patch. His flight was undulating and rapid, and he fairly plunged head first into the green depths of the willow. Evidently there was a hungry mouth there calling for that grasshopper.

I had never seen a shrike's nest, and was devoured with curiosity. But I have found in my career as a nature-student that it always pays to curb extreme anxiety, and just to loiter around and wait for things to turn up. So we sat still as mice, all eyes for whatever might happen thereabouts.

Presently Mr. Shrike was back to the post again, with more plunder. This time he hopped over on the wire past his neatly arranged shelves of insect meat, and deftly thrust his catch on that unoccupied barb beside the one living grasshopper. It seemed a proof of extra orderliness of mind that would refuse to waste a single barb, even though there was an endless number to choose from all down those rods of fence. Callie whispered a conjecture that he intended to fill every one of those double barbs in order, at least as far as the willow tree. That would be an ornithological curiosity to boast about,—two or three rods of grasshopper meat in groups of twos.

His insect safely spiked, Mr. Shrike looked the array over, and then hopped back to the near-by post. But he didn't stay there, for with a downward, hawklike swoop, his wings reefed closely over his back, he pitched into the

grass and sailed up again to his post with a struggling captive in his beak. He got his bearings, and was off like a feathered shot for the willow.

"Let's play a trick on him!" whispered Callie, and as I nodded consent, Callie ran over to the fence, took the still kicking grasshopper from its spit, killed it, and put it on the adjoining barb. This left the arrangement from the post to be: first, the two grasshoppers impaled on twin barbs, then an insect on a single barb in each of the next two groups. Chuckling to himself, Callie came back and we awaited Mr. White-Rump's next appearance.

Soon he was back with a grasshopper, as before. He hopped from his post along the fence-wire, past his two captives twinned together, then past the first single one. But when he came to the third group of barbs and found the insect Callie had mischievously moved there, he paused. He glanced back and forth several times, his tail switching more nervously than before. He seemed to be shaking his head over the perversity of grasshoppers that will not stay where they are placed. At last he put the insect he held over on the barb that should have retained the last one, crowding it down rather more carefully than he had the one Callie moved. Then he went to the insect that had not remained put, and with his beak tamped it down well, as though saying:

"There! I'll fix you so you don't move this time!"

Again he pounced down upon an innocent passer-by in the grass, and carried it off to the willow. And again Callie, with mischievous chuckles, slipped over to the

fence and moved the last captive to a barb all its own just beyond the other one he had shifted.

This time, when Mr. White-Rump came back, and went along the fence, and perched beside the barbs where he had not expected to find a grasshopper, one could fairly see his jaw drop.

"What ails grasshoppers to-day, anyway?" he seemed to be wondering.

After a bit, he flew off to the tree with his prey, evidently of the opinion that the only way to be sure of his catches was to feed them up forthwith. It was some little time before he came back again, and then he only stopped to rest on his post a bit and look over his supplies, and he flew off home without leaving any additions to the stock. The next time he came back he had evidently decided that the right side of the post was hoodooed, for he impaled his prey on the first barb on the left, fairly hammering it into place.

Callie then caught a grasshopper himself, and after killing it, thus being more merciful than Mr. White-Rump, he hung it on the other upward spine of that first barb. White-rump coming back later, discovered the two there, and with a muttered "peemp!" of disgust, seized Callie's grasshopper and flew off to the nest with two in his mouth.

"He accepts the goods the gods provide," I laughed. "Now just go on catching them, if you please, Mr. Callie."

Callie laughed, and catching a big green fellow put him in the same place. But Mr. Shrike didn't come back, and the setting sun forced us to leave and go on

after the cows. When we returned, however, we were amused to notice that Mr. White-Rump had accepted the situation philosophically and had deposited another hopper on the adjoining barb. He had evidently decided that if grasshoppers didn't like to bunch up by twos, he would have to humor them.

We stopped at the willow, and found the nest, a bulky affair of sticks and weeds, feathers and bark, on a fork where it was well protected from sun and rain, and from enemies both above and below. It was much like a robin's nest in appearance, but larger, and, as we found later, without the mud interlining. For when the nestlings were gone we took down the nest and tore it apart, just to find out what it was made of. There were the following materials in the structure: weed stems, grass, cornstalk shreds, rootlets, paper, wool, shreds of bark, wood splinters, strings, twigs, horse hair, and chicken feathers, twelve ingredients in all. The chicken feathers made the lining, and there was such a thick bedding of them that the eggs were almost buried therein.

When Callie commenced to climb the tree the mother, an exact duplicate of Mr. White-Rump in color and size, flew off with a loud "peemp! peemp!"

"She always does that," said Callie. "This is the second brood for this nest. They built it in April, and I often came to see the eggs and the nestlings, but that highty-tighty female just can't get used to me. Want to come up?"

I forthwith went up to see for myself what there was to be seen. The nest contained five grayish eggs with a faint tinge of green mold to the shell, spotted with light

brown and faint purple camouflage. They are the most difficult eggs to describe, both as to ground color and markings, having a generally moldy and dunnish appearance. Perhaps this is to deceive egg-sucking enemies into thinking them bad, or a protective shading blending nicely with the feather-bed background.

We decided that the father had been feeding the mother on the nest, and agreed to call every day thereafter. Callie had watched one brood grow up and take flight, but was willing to share this second vigil as well.

The next day we were back at the fence, ready for Mr. White-Rump. But evidently he had need of all he caught that day, for though he stopped two or three times on that favorite post and looked over his savings, he left nothing and flew away soon. Neither was the mother in the nest when we went there to look things over. But she soon flew in with food, and though she fussed when Callie climbed up to peep in, she hovered about ready to feed one of the three nestlings he found there. Huge-mouthed, naked, pot-bellied and clawed, they were not a pleasant sight to our critical eyes and we did not stay long.

Callie made further advances toward Mr. White-Rump by bringing a contribution of one dead but freshly caught grasshopper and fastening it on a barb some two or three removed from Mr. White-Rump's latest deposit. Mr. White-Rump himself was perching momentarily on his post, but did not leave as Callie approached. He was all attention, however, and as soon as Callie had gone back some feet, he was over there like a flash, and off to the nest with the grasshopper.

"Thanks!" laughed Callie, imitating the bird's hasty "peemp!" as he seized the morsel.

From this time, we were on the friendliest terms with the shrike family. We were permitted to watch their nesting affairs, though neither bird appeared quite at ease when we climbed the tree. But they were never hostile, and when we kept a respectful distance they came and went freely, and if they thought anything at all about us, took us for good spirits more helpful than harmful.

When the five babies were a week old they had begun to look less like yawning gargoyles and had donned a coating of down in our honor, and we enjoyed our visits more.

Sometimes Callie would take grasshoppers up the tree with him and feed the youngsters. They would take the insects from him without question, seeming to think grasshoppers were always good, no matter how provided. First he had to poke the insects down the yawning gullets, after crushing them up slightly. But soon the bantlings had learned to feed from his fingers, and then from his hand, and at last, before they took flight, they would even dive head first into a candy sack to get the coveted hoppers.

Once when I was calling at the nest, I saw one of the little birds spew up a pellet which, on examination, proved to be wing-cases and such hard bits of grasshopper anatomy. As we had not found such débris about the nest, we concluded that the parents carried the pellets away so they would not litter the ground and thus betray the presence of the young.

When the nestlings became fledglings, they were the dearest mites. Feathered in a silky white ending in a wash of fawn, with tiny tails like fluted white paper fans, miniature wings of black and white, and staring at us through great black goggles, it was a joy and a delight just to look at them. As long as they were to be found in the tree, perched five in a row or each by his lonesome, Callie and I were content to chase grasshoppers just for an excuse to be welcomed to the shrike home. We knew they were mercenary, that it was the hoppers they welcomed rather than us, but we were humbly content to be accepted on those terms. To have five silky, squealing balls of down greeting us with open mouths and hurrying along a branch or fluttering down past several branches in the effort to be the first to reach us, was reward enough. It was truly a lonely day for us both when we went to the willow and found it empty.

The larder, by the way, was neither added to nor subtracted from during those days the five youngsters kept their parents on the wing. The grasshoppers became dry and broken, and gradually crumbled away in the wind and weather. But though Mr. White-Rump sometimes visited his post for a short rest, he seemed much too busy to stop long, and never had an insect to spare for the collection. And as live juicy insects were plentiful he wisely forbore feeding these dry fragments to his hungry young. Nevertheless, this practice of hoarding a thing even though it is not afterward used, is not wholly mysterious in the shrike. Blue jays lay up corn and nuts, crows hide provisions against the day of need, bees store up honey, squirrels keep a supply of nuts ready to tap,

and man lays up a snug bank account for a rainy day. And, if in these other animals this same habit is called wise frugality, the shrike's desire for a food supply greater than he needs at the time is not to be condemned.

VI

THE TABLES TURNED

One October day, when I was visiting in the country, Callie called me to see a shrike which was loitering about the yard. The canary's cage was hanging just outside the front door, and though the bird was doubly protected by its cage and by the wire screening all about the porch Mr. White-Rump plainly had his eye on that canary.

With that careless white patch on the back of his bluish-ash coat and scowling out from under his heavy black eyebrows, he looked brigandish enough to set the canary wild with apprehension, had the songster not been too busily engaged in singing, eating, and dozing to notice his enemy's presence.

White-rump seemed keen for canary meat, and appeared willing to wait around in the hope that "something would turn up" to make its acquisition possible. He perched in an almost leafless cherry tree near by, his eyes glued on that appetizing yellow bird. His tail kept switching nervously from side to side, like a cat's when she is on the watch at a mouse-hole, though once in a while he would stretch a leg or a wing wearily, or yawn. Occasionally, he gave an impatient but smothered "peemp!" which, so Callie remarked, sounded like "scolding behind his teeth." Several different times,

too, he flew out toward the porch, and along beside the screening, as though reconnoitering for some opening which might have escaped him from the tree. Not finding any way to enter, he always came back to the cherry tree and resumed his watch.

Suddenly the poultry in the barnyard set up a cry of "Hawk! Hawk!" and we noticed a large henhawk sailing over the grain-field beyond the barn. This distracted our attention from white-rump for a moment, and when we looked back at him it was very plain that he, too, had seen the henhawk. He was a changed bird. He had gone up into the very top of the cherry tree, where there was a clump of leaves still hanging, and was cowering there, the picture of fear.

Again the hens set up their frantic cry, and the chickenhawk was seen almost over the yard. That was too much for white-rump. He lost all confidence in that tiny cluster of leaves as a protection, and scurried out of it as fast as he could go, no doubt wishing he had done so in the first place. He fairly shot out of the treetop, and diving into a thick evergreen several yards away, disappeared from view.

We turned our attention to the evergreen, and finally discovered our bold robber baron skulking there like a craven. He was humped up in a little gray bunch, deep in the branches and as close to the tree-trunk as he could get, and he looked more like a gray knot or a dead stub than a living bird. One could fairly see him shiver; beyond a doubt, his blood was running cold in his veins and his toothless mandibles chattering with fear.

For some time, the henhawk hovered above the field.

We were very dubious about his knowing of white-rump's presence, but the shrike seemed to think it could be nothing other than his precious bones the great robber was after, and crouched there motionless. Nearly an hour later, long after the henhawk had gone away, white-rump was still crouched in the evergreen, almost paralyzed with terror. It was not until along in the afternoon that he ventured out, and skurried away from that horrible place.

There was no more loitering about for canary meat, either that day or any other. Perhaps he felt convinced that the canary was under the henhawk's special protection, perhaps the memory of that awful fright was sufficient to make him loathe the neighborhood. At least, that was the last we saw of him in the yard.

VII

THE SNOW-LOVERS

We had gone to the woods for a snow-shoeing jaunt. But it turned out to be a holiday with the tree-sparrow, that most interesting and characteristic little winter bird.

They are such brave mites, the tree-sparrows that swarm the pineries of northern Minnesota from autumn to April. They are ever faithful, and stay the season through, no matter how stormy and cold and long it may be. And they are always cheerful amid buffeting winds and drifting flakes and snapping frost. The snow is their chosen element; and they can live in it, over it, or under it with perfect ease. They are the most enthusiastic of all the snowbirds, and take care not to migrate so far south that they cannot spend the winter in their favorite haunts. So in the autumn they arrive in flocks from the Canadian forests where they have nested, the advance guard appearing with the first snow-cloud. In April they follow the retreating drifts northward to their breeding-places.

They are feathered nomads wandering wherever food entices them, just so it doesn't call them away from the snow-decked pineries.

Tree-sparrows are to our winter woods what their

English cousins are to the town, but infinitely more ornamental and lovable. They are as numerous as the familiar feathered gamins of our down-town streets, and have the sparrow clannishness and cheeriness in a high degree. But in temperament the two species are quite unlike. The tree-sparrow has something of the cold breezes, the silent pines, the snowy stretches, of the winter solitudes he frequents; he is a Jack Frost in feathers. Though a friendly little fellow, he has not the conceited familiarity characterizing the house-sparrow, and is as undomesticated as the blue jay, crow, and owl.

Catch a tree-sparrow coming down-town and setting up headquarters? Hardly. He is not a bashful bird at all; but, if you want to see him, you must go out where he is. That is all you have to do; he promptly welcomes your appearance, and, cordial without impertinence, sees to it that you get plenty of his company.

And what a cunning little fluff of down the bird is! erect, dignified almost to pomposity, in a neat business suit of pepper and salt (both cayenne and black), a dark chestnut cap he always seems to be lifting in pleased cordiality, and a tiny spot in the center of his vest which must be some fraternal badge, it is worn so constantly and so proudly.

Well, as soon as we left town and struck into the wooded road, flocks of these dainty mites accompanied us. They flitted about the tangles and bushes, and kept up a constant twitter, as friendly and commonplace as an English sparrow's chatter, but much more pleasant to the ear.

One flock was making merry about a rail fence like so

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

TREE SPARROW

many rollicking boys. They would dart to the top rails and poise there an instant, twittering gleefully, then dive headlong into the soft snow, saved only from drowning therein by their fluffy bodies, too light to disappear beneath. Indeed, they almost seemed to float on the downy drifts, and made a comical sight craning their necks at us in childlike curiosity and invitation combined.

"Don't your feet get cold?" we asked a couple, perching side by side on a snowy rail; and for reply one raised a little foot and tucked it into the feather muff slung about its neck, while its companion replied with a merry chirp:

"When one foot gets warm and the other cold, why, I just shift them about," and suited the action to the word.

We passed many flocks holding some sort of social session, so happy in one another's society they twittered together in a sweet, antiphonal chorus. The tones were thinner than those of the song-sparrow, though that might be due to the cold, still air. But they were not so strident as chippy's shrill notes, perhaps mellowed by the soft snow muffler through which they must pass.

Sometimes a whole colony of them would be in full tune, mouths open, throats fluttering, bosoms throbbing, as though it were the rarest of June days. Sometimes part of a flock carried on a sort of semi-chorus, with a humming accompaniment from the rest of the birds chattering away to themselves. Once a lone singer in a young birch favored us with a little ditty as a solo. Its song was rather informal, opening with one or two

long syllables in recitative effect, and ending in a laughing little trill, the notes as sweet and clear as tinkling icicles.

These flocks remained absolutely fearless as we snow-shoed by. But how one group scurried from sight into the thick firs when a crow suddenly gave voice from the top of a dead pine overlooking the scene! It may be it was the crow himself; it may be merely the tone of his voice; or it may be he called, "Hawk!" But whatever they connected with that hoarse shout, it was sufficiently alarming to put them to flight. Later in the day we observed a flock fairly tumbling out of sight as the shadow of a crow went over. An instant before, they had been in full tune; but their quick disappearance made the wood as silent as if sound itself had frozen with fright. The danger over, the terrified flock promptly reappeared, all alarm forgotten. It would seem that they prefer the border of tree clumps, and seek the denser parts only as a precautionary measure.

Once I sat down on a stump to fix my snow-shoe, and several of the mites alighted in a clump of dogwoods near by, and eyed me inquisitively, their heads canted first on one side and then the other, as they asked each other *sotto voce:*

"Now, what do you suppose she is doing with that snow-shoe? Nothing ever goes wrong with ours."

And that was true enough, for everywhere the snow was traced with their trails, tell-tale records of their gay activities.

The tracks were thicker about the bushes and weeds,

the tiny prints as dainty as embroidery work, and winding and interwinding in an intricate pattern of curves, festoons, loops, and angles quite fascinating to follow. There were walking trails, the footprints perfectly spaced. But one ran out across an open space, the prints of a pair of tiny feet at regular intervals but unusually far apart, connected with slender hair-like lines, showing that the bird had gone plunging across in long hops, just skimming the snow with his toes between bounds. It would be interesting to know what made the little embroiderer in such haste, and why, if he must hurry, he didn't take to his wings. And why, when he got himself half-way across the open space, did he turn back at an acute angle, and hop almost back to where he started, and then jog off at right angles a few hops, and leave the trail abruptly "in the air"? And did he leave it of his own free will, or was he hoisted up by some marauding enemy?

In another open space we found what looked like indisputable evidence that tree-sparrows, like cows, sheep, and humans, follow paths. For one trail, and a more or less winding one at that, stretching between two dogwood clumps, had been used by more than one bird. The tracks were irregularly close together, and even overlapping until the original ones were obliterated in spots. Were they all made at one time by a flock of tree-sparrows traveling Indian file, or had one bird made the trail, and others followed it from time to time? Truly, a bird's thoughts, like a boy's, are long, long thoughts, and far from comprehensible, even to sympathetic observers. Some of the patterns would almost

convince one the birds had been playing some game, such as fox and geese, or follow me.

Another one of these complicated trails led to a small, snow-covered clump of gooseberry canes, and when investigated was found to lead into a snug little den with a floor of dead leaves and sticks and an arched dome of the canes roofed with snow, a warm igloo for some feathered Eskimo, who probably came and went daily as he felt the need of a nap.

Dogwood-bushes and weed clumps were particularly favored with these embroidered footprints in the snow, and with good reason. For it was a common sight to see the birds feeding either on the bushes and weed-sprays or from the snowy cloth beneath. Sometimes a bird would alight on a weed with a bound, scattering a shower of seeds down upon the table spread below. He would follow them, and stand there munching contentedly, up to the knees in snow. Sometimes one bird would be feeding on a spray while a companion stood beneath, literally eating the crumbs that fell from the table.

At the edge of a small creek was a bit of open water, a spring that Jack Frost could not seal. The bank was a mass of bird-tracks, with little trails radiating from it off into the clumps. And, cold as the day was, some of the hardy mites were bathing. They flopped about in the shallows, sometimes for several minutes, spattering and paddling as joyously as so many boys in a favorite swimming-hole. Frequently there was a perfect spray of pearly drops from fluttering wings and dancing feet and slapping tails, accompanied by much gleeful chatter.

As each bather finished, he flew into the bushes near by, where he carefully fanned his plumage dry and preened it smooth.

At about sunset we were on our way home, when we suddenly missed our feathered companions. What could have become of them? No more chatter and twitter and flutter; the woods were deserted and silent except as now and then a single tree-sparrow flew out with a startled air almost from under our feet.

We wondered and debated, until my sister remembered the igloo she had found in the gooseberry-bush. The next time we flushed one of the birds we investigated the underbrush from which he darted out, and found we had disturbed him in his wigwam.

In this way we found a cozy apartment hollowed out in many a sheltered nook, some bird's sleeping-quarters. They were under long, thick tufts of grass, with tiny doorways like the entrance to an Eskimo hut. Cunning burrows had been made in sod mounds, bedded warm with dry grass, and sided with snow walls. And there were wigwams in plenty, made under sticks, canes, weed-stems, and other sheltering props.

Indeed, it seemed that everywhere we looked we discovered sleeping tree-sparrows. Some were so tired with the day's activities they slumbered right along, their heads cuddled under their wings and their whole bodies curled into a ball of warm feathers. But frequently they were not so far into the Land of Nod that they were not aroused, when they darted out of bed with a loud, squeaky twitter, as if bidding us get home and leave them in peace. They would fly into bushes and scold a

bit until we went on, quite put out over our untimely curiosity.

But we had no more than turned our backs on them when the querulous hubbub would die down and they would go back to bed again.

Tree-sparrow is one acquaintance you can make only in the winter. Go out and find him; you will be repaid for any effort it costs you.

VIII

IN SIGHT BUT UNSEEN

One January afternoon I was on my way to the library when near a busy street-corner I noticed a peculiar blood-red patch on the snowy sidewalk.

Wondering what it might be, and with considerable amateur detective thrill, I approached and paused to examine it. It was not blood, but the red, pulpy skins of many mountain-ash berries strewn carelessly about, yet in a rather compact patch. Naturally I glanced up into the tree growing close to the sidewalk, and found myself looking into the overhanging branches of a mountain-ash.

And then the reason for the mangled fruit was explained, for a thick-set, thick-billed bird was sitting on a branch directly over my head. In build he resembled the Fat Boy Dickens has described with such gusto, and, like him, he was feasting. In the big-beaked, big-bodied, sparrow-like bird, with a wash of dull crimson over his gray and brown, I recognized a pine-grosbeak. He looked the gourmand to perfection, too, for his red head and neck gave him the appearance of being "buried to the crop" in the luscious bunch of berries hanging just over his head.

He did not mind the cold at all, for his grayish-brown

overcoat was thick and warm, and the skirt of it was draped about his feet. Indeed, he looked most comfortable sitting there. He had the air of carrying plenty of warmth about with him, for his gray and crimson made him resemble a half-burned coal perched on the branch, defying winter blast and snow. Then, too, the cheery red berries added a hearth-fire glow to the spot, and at times his beak was quite buried in them.

If he had been swallowing the red, pulpy skins, instead of strewing them about on the snow, one would have declared he was full to bursting his greedy crop; for his breast was all aglow with the same rich crimson as that of the fruit. But, as he carefully avoided swallowing the pulp, one must be content to say that the juicy stain was on the outside, and not on the inside, of his crop.

It was interesting to watch him industriously eating away, not hastily, but in a businesslike manner as if thinking, "Here is good food, and no need of wasting it, particularly as I need food and have nothing better to do." His manner of eating was peculiar. I have seen robins eat mountain-ash berries, and they always gobble them down greedily, seeds and pulp alike, a whole berry at a bite. But pine-grosbeak seemed to have a strong dislike for the red pulp, and would not permit himself to swallow a bit of it. Did he dislike the color, or the taste, or the feeling of the berries in his throat? Or is it that, having been classed with the seed-eating finches, he intends to stand by that classification strictly and eat nothing but seeds, no matter how temptingly they may be disguised?

He was as deft with his beak as though it had been a knife, fork, and spoon combined, and extracted the seeds from the fruit, and rid himself of the pulp, with clever skill. I was interested in the process. He would nip a berry off the cluster, and with it impaled on his beak would mumble into it, chew out the seeds, and swallow them, all as neatly as though he had both fingers and forks to aid him. Then with a flip of his beak he would toss the undesired pulp away and lift his head for another berry.

He was as systematic about his eating as though he must get through to catch a train or keep an engagement; and, although I stood close beneath him and watched him make away with a great bunch of berries, a dozen or more in the cluster, he paid no attention to me, and continued his meal calmly, eating steadily but without undue haste.

I picked up some of the discarded pulp, and found that in every case he had got both seeds out; and, although the berry was more or less broken, it could be closed into shape again, as round and whole as a freshly pitted cherry. I admired his skill, but couldn't help wondering why he didn't eat the pulp. As every bird knows, it is sweet and edible, and pine-grosbeak's eccentricity in this respect must be a constant source of wonder to all his friends, feathered and unfeathered alike. As the bird-books state that pine-grosbeak feeds on the buds of trees and on frozen apples, there is no accounting for his careful rejection of the pulp of the mountain-ash berry, a fruit closely related to the apple.

Another odd thing about the bird was his solitary

state. All members of the finch family, and those belonging to the sparrow division particularly, are very gregarious, and grosbeaks are no exception. I have often seen them in flocks, feeding and chatting sociably. Of course, there may be bachelors and hermits among the birds; and, if so, this particular pine-grosbeak was surely one. But he was not grouchy and ill-natured, or even taciturn; for occasionally he would utter a chinking "eek, eek," between bites when a house-sparrow flitted into the tree or the adjoining maple.

As I stood there watching the bird and the berries, many people passed by, or stopped to take the west-bound car. And although they looked at me curiously, and a few even glanced up to learn what attracted my attention, not one of them, even the boys, seemed at all interested in the unusual down-town visitor.

When I returned from the library, I was on the opposite side of the street. The bird was still sitting where I had left him; for, one bunch finished, he had merely hopped a few steps to another branch and begun on a second cluster hanging heavy over his head. It was as if the cluster would hang heavy on his conscience if he left it untouched. He believed in thanking Nature for her bounty by frank appreciation and franker acceptance.

I stopped on the opposite corner, and watched the passers-by, wondering whether any one else would observe and appreciate the bird. I waited ten minutes by the clock, and during that time twenty-two persons passed along beneath the bird, treading in the mass of red pulp. But only two of the number observed the

berries, and they no more than glanced up. Seeing it was "only a bird," they lost interest immediately, and went on about their affairs; and by so doing closed their minds to a pretty and interesting bit of bird life.

IX

"ROOKIES"

"I WAS once marking some boundaries on the shore of a northern lake," said my friend the surveyor reminiscently, "when I discovered several 'rookies' swimming in an open space in a wild-rice bayou."

"And what is a 'rookie,' pray tell me?"

"It is the ruddy duck, blessed, so they say, with sixty-seven different names,—dumb bird, deaf duck, fool duck, bull-neck, salt-water teal, spinetail duck, dipper duck, and sixty others. Didn't you ever see one? It is a queer-looking bird for a duck,—bunty and short, whether on the wing or in the water. It looks as if odds and ends of several different birds had been put together by some ingenious person to make a new species. It has the scaup's dished blue beak, a wedge-shaped tail fanned like a pigeon's and spined like a cormorant's; broad-tipped coot-wings; the plump, squat body of the teal; the bob-white's small head and thick neck; the flight of a partridge; the diving tricks of a grebe; and a goose-like egg."

"Then my only wonder is that the bird hasn't more names!" I observed.

"Well, there they were, a dozen or more of them, idly floating about in the smooth water, the prettiest sight you could wish to see. The males were elegant crea-

tures in all their faultless courting apparel. In spring and summer, their plumage, you know, is rich and striking,—a bright, glossy, chestnut-red coat, a grayish-white vest, blue-gray bill, white cheeks, a jet-black pompadour from the beak over the eyes and down on the back of the neck, and brownish-black tail feathers spreading fanwise from a white tail tuft.

"They were surely beauties, and their plain, brownish-gray mates seemed enchanted with their dashing bridegrooms, and kept close to them, as if they had forgotten that all this beauty must fade in the fall and that during the winter they must put up with husbands as dull and prosy as themselves.

"About their tails—I forgot to tell you that the males always carry this useful appendage ornamentally cocked up at right angles to the body when they are floating on the water, full-spread like a sail in the breeze! You can always tell a ruddy duck by that manner of carrying the tail; no other duck has it, although it is effective enough to be copied by every member of the family. No doubt it does serve the purpose of a sail, incidentally, for I noticed that each male kept his tail turned to the wind whenever possible, but that its fanwise spread is chiefly ornamental was proved by the fact that the male always swims in advance of the female. In circling the pond, Mr. Ruddy was often obliged, when circling against the wind, to swing around sidewise and tack his way along, for of course he would never proclaim that beautiful tail a nuisance by folding it up. When he found difficulty in making progress, his mate considerately dallied in the rear.

"I watched them for some time. Then, wishing to see them on the wing, I tossed a stone into the group. Those nearest the rice swamp dived and immediately disappeared; but those farther out, which could command space for starting, ran on the surface of the water for some little distance, with that splattering gait of the coot taking to wing. While getting under headway they faced directly into the wind and beat their wings rapidly. After leaving the water, they flew low, with a drumming partridge beat of their broad, short wings, and soon all had disappeared in the rice.

"Still curious about the 'rookies,' the first I had ever had the chance to study closely, I decided to look for some nests. I searched along the banks and scrutinized the wild-rice clumps carefully, but without success. But I kept looking. Surely, thought I, mid-May should be a good time to find the birds brooding. Finally I succeeded in scaring a female 'rookie' from a mass of reeds, dry rushes and grass and loose feathers half floating on the water. She was brooding eleven eggs, which I never should have taken for hers had I not seen her leaving the nest. They were too large, relatively, for her size, white with a tinge of stone gray, as if made from crockery ware, and pebbled like a goose egg.

"Near by this nest was another one, which I should easily have missed altogether had I seen it before the other. It was resting on the water, rising and falling with the ripples as I paddled the water with my hand. I waded out to it, and was surprised upon lifting a covering of feathers and loose reed stems to find ten of the same goose-like eggs there. It was certainly either the

abandoned nest of a coot, or one made in imitation of the coot design. The flags and rice stems round it had been broken down and the nest material piled upon them, just as a coot builds. Had I happened upon it without previously seeing the ruddy ducks about, and without seeing the other nest, I should have gone forth proclaiming that I had indubitable evidence of a goose brooding in a coot's nest!

"A few days later, I found eight of those stone-colored eggs in the same nest where I had seen a coot brooding a few weeks previously. As the eggs are so different in appearance, coots' eggs being creamy white and freckled and noticeably smaller, there could be no mistaking the fact that Madam Rookie, finding a ready-made nest at hand, had moved in and gone to brooding without the trouble of preparing a cradle. Whether the second nest I discovered was an abandoned coot-nest, or one made by a female 'rookie' by the coot pattern, I cannot say.

"I watched the nests daily, and one morning was fortunate enough to witness a hatching. The young lay in the cradle until they had got their breath, while the mother waited near by in the water, leaving the hot sun to do the work of drying her brood. An hour later the nest was deserted, and the little downy 'rookies,' of their mother's nondescript color, were swimming about here and there with their fond parents in close attendance. For now the male, who had stayed strictly away from the nest, had joined them, and was apparently as proud and loving a parent as the mother."

X

LORD HARRY

My friend the pioneer remarked that he is fond of the marsh harrier. One of the handsome birds, perched on a fence-post enjoying a sunbath or digesting a full meal is as interesting and decorative a detail of natural scenery as he would care to see anywhere; he could watch it all day on the wing, and he admires it for its intelligence and its affectionate disposition.

"A hawk affectionate!" I doubted, studying one of the haughty birds posed full in the sunlight on a post not a dozen feet away as we motored by. They are respected for their gopher-catching abilities, and seem to realize their safety from harm, being about as indifferent to man's presence as domestic fowls.

"Sure he's affectionate," replied my friend. "Why, we had a pet hawk once that was as faithful as a dog."

"Tell me all about him," I urged, and settled myself for the story.

"My brother and I adopted Lord Harry when he was a little fellow. We found the nest in May, on the top of an old straw-stack in the corner of a field near a slough. We could just see Lady Marsh's brown back over the edge of the nest, but Lord Marsh was nearly always in sight, flying in circles around the stack or near it, and

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

MARSH HAWK

we never tired of watching him. It seemed a sort of courting flight, or an entertainment for his mate's benefit, for it was not that low, smooth soaring and ranging for food, but was all trimmed up with somersaults and zigzags as though he were flying a tune, or rather, the accompaniment to his own screechings and caterwaulings. He was a beautiful fellow, the white tail ring going well with the gray blue of his coat and his snowy vest. It was the vest we saw most of the time, except when he was resting on a fence-post or buckbrush. Sometimes Lady Marsh would fly around with him, but it was always easy to tell them apart, because of her darker colors and larger size."

"Then," I interrupted, "it is the female bird one sees everywhere in North Dakota, from daylight until dark, all summer long,—brownish-black with the white tail ring and yellow breast spotted with rust?"

"Yes, or young males. In their first feather, all young marsh harriers resemble their mothers.

"But Lord Marsh didn't spend all his time in play. He hunted, too, and we often saw him sailing low over the fields and sloughs, turning this way and that, like a setter ranging for game. There's nothing prettier to watch than the harrier's hunting flight, is there?—a few strong flaps, then a low, swooping sail sideways or forward, a slight bend of a wing and a dip of the broad tail to change its course; another beat of the wings, another easy, quiet, graceful sail, and finally a sudden drop into the grass. If they stay long, you know they are eating what they've just caught; if they rise at once, either they missed their prey or they've got a cricket or a mouse or

a gopher for a hungry youngster. Lord and Lady Marsh made a game of his feeding her, I remember. She would fly off the nest to meet him; he would hover above her and drop his prey, and she would catch it in her claws as it fell. We thought Lady Marsh ought to grow fat and handsome on all he fed her, but sometimes she would go foraging herself, for exercise, perhaps, or to keep in practice.

"Then Lord Marsh would roost on the nest a while. But I doubt if he ever did the eggs much good; he must have stood up to brood, as we could always see his whole head and body, and even some of his trouser-legs hanging over the edge.

"We never got a chance to see the eggs, for the parents kept too close watch on them. Lord Harry, our pet, was one of the older sons of the family,—you know hawk's eggs take turns hatching, like cuckoo's and owl's, and the young are not all the same age when the hatching is over. After two of the youngsters were able to tumble down the straw-stack and scramble about on the ground looking for food, or playing tag with each other, the parents were still feeding others in the nest. We'd see them feeding all, those on the ground as well as the nestlings, and we'd see the parents carry the older ones in their claws back to the nest at night for safe keeping.

"One day we found Lord Harry about a dozen rods from the stack, and decided to kidnap him. Charlie watched that the old ones weren't near, or didn't come swooping down on me, and I dropped my coat over Lord Harry, picked him up, and scooted for the barn. He never squeaked, and if the parents ever missed him they

never bothered to look for him. Perhaps they thought a weasel got him.

"We put him in a chicken-coop in the barn. For a while we had to feed him meat scraps and grasshoppers and gophers and mice and frogs. He would eat meat, but liked live food best, and kept us busy snaring game for him. But he lived and thrived, and by the time he fully feathered out he was as tame and faithful in coming back home as a dog or a cat.

"I remember that fall, when we'd come from threshing, or from town, Lord Harry would be on a fence-post by the gate looking for us. He would see us a long way off, and fly out to meet us, and ride back on the standard of the hay-rack. Sometimes, when we came from town, he would be on a post a quarter of a mile from the house, waiting for us, and as soon as he spied us coming over the hill, would fly on to the buggy top, or, if we held the whip butt-end up, he'd perch on that and ride home in state. Or he would perch on the horse's collar for a change. He was always riding around the yard on our shoulders or hopping along behind us as we did the chores.

"The next summer he went out to the fields with us all season. He would forage in the sloughs and fields, or ride on the horse's back, or on one of our shoulders, and had a good time generally. He'd stay with us all day, and ride back at night, and never leave us as long as we were about the yard. Then he would take to the haymow for the night, and be ready for the next day's work bright and early. He kept the barn well moused, and got lots of crickets and hoppers up in the mow.

He'd perch on a rafter while we boys forked hay, and dive on a mouse or cricket with the speed of lightning. From the first we taught him he mustn't bother the chickens, and he never did that we knew of. He was so intelligent that a few good beatings with a chicken held in plain sight, when he had been bothering or killing them, was all the lesson he needed to keep away from them.

"One time mother complained of a mole in the garden, and so we set Lord Harry on it. When he got the scent of that mole, he went after it and dug it out, claw over claw, like a dog after a rabbit. I've seen him dig a field-mouse out of its runway, too, tearing up dirt and sod with both feet and beak.

"Lord Harry went through his first moult when he was a year old, and then he was a sick-looking bird. He was dumpy and dull, and didn't care to eat, and we thought he was going to die. But after he had shed his feathers by pairs all over the yard, he commenced to act more lively. Finally he came out in his new suit, the dove-gray that his father wore, and he was a dandy. He chirked up and was as gay as a cricket all fall.

"But along in the winter he flew home one day, wounded. Some one had shot him, probably by mistake, for Lord Harry was quite a celebrated character in the neighborhood, and every one who came to our farm knew and liked him. We found him dead in the yard that night when we came home from town, and Charlie and I buried him with honors, and painted on his tombstone: 'Here lies Lord Harry. He loved his friends,—man could do no more.'"

XI

SANDIE, THE LION-TAMER

SANDIE is a pet crane belonging to a farmer named Clayton, who lives in North Dakota. Ray, the farmer's son, caught Sandie before the bird was old enough to fly, but only after a brisk chase, for he was already agile and swift on his legs.

"When he started off across the pasture on his long, awkward legs," so Ray always says, "flapping his wings for help, I thought it would be easy to run him down. But, no sir! He was harder to catch than a young rooster, and I was just about winded by the time I got him. The way that bird could twist and turn on those pipe-stem legs of his was funny to see, and I laugh yet whenever I think of the way he kept me dodging about after him. And on the straight-away he could run like a streak, too, and if it hadn't 'a' been for my dog, I wouldn't 'a' got him at all."

Sandie's wings are clipped, so he is permitted to wander at will about the barnyard. He finds his favorite food in a slough down in the pasture, and when frogs and snails are scarce there he visits the garden for cutworms and bugs. The farmer says Sandie is worth wages just as a potato-bug catcher. It is a droll sight to see him stalk along between the rows of potatoes, his

spear-like beak flashing out first one side and then the other. This is a trick he learned by following Ray when busy at the work; at first Ray fed him those he caught, but now Sandie has learned to do his own spearing and does a cleaner and faster job than Ray can, so Mr. Clayton declares. Sometimes Ray takes advantage of this, and after starting Sandie off down a row, goes off and leaves him to finish it, and Sandie has even been known to go out there alone and begin working the patch. It is laughable to see the big bird gravely sticking to the job as faithfully as though he were working for a day's wage.

At first, small chickens were not safe when Sandie was at liberty, but Ray finally succeeded in breaking him of his chicken-stealing habits, by punishing him severely for every offense. So now he has the run of the premises, and is as good a mouser as he is fisher and potato-bugger.

Sandie is quite a vaudeville performer in his way, for he can swallow nails, empty thread spools, bits of tin, marbles and such indigestible material, which he regurgitates when they commence to trouble him. So whenever the family has company Sandie must be brought out for a sword-swallowing demonstration. Besides being a champion sword-swallower he is the terror of stray dogs, and thereby won his other title of Sandie the Lion-Tamer.

One afternoon a man drove into the farmyard with a big dog, a cross between a mastiff and a Newfoundland, sitting proudly beside him. Sandie, in his favorite pose, was standing on one foot, apparently fast asleep.

"Gr-r-r-r-r-r-r!" growled the dog, and he sprang from the automobile, bristling with fight.

"Better call off your dog, Mr. Johnson," cried Ray. "Sandie'll mill him good if he gets too near."

"Huh!" scoffed Mr. Johnson. "Better call off your bird, Ray. Lion will make a mouthful of him in another minute."

"Don't you be too sure of that," persisted Ray. "I've seen him make too many dogs run."

"I'll bet five dollars that Lion'll send that crane scooting," declared Mr. Johnson with zealous loyalty to his dog's ability.

"I haven't got but fifty cents," grinned Ray, "but I'll risk that much on Sandie."

"All right, ten to one goes. Put up your money. Good. Now sic 'em, Lion."

Lion sprang forward with a bound and a growl. Sandie partially opened one eye but did not move a feather except to settle his doubly curved neck a little more firmly on his shoulders. But when the dog was within a foot of him without drooping his uplifted leg or flirting a folded wing Sandie made his counter-attack with one well-directed move. His long neck uncurved and shot forward like a javelin, and his sharp beak buried itself in the dog's nose.

The ferocious Lion doubled up like a gigantic measuring-worm, and with his tail between his legs and all four feet coming down together, he bounded out of the yard and off down the road, yelping with pain at every step. As for Sandie, he merely drew in his neck, folded it up, and closing his one eye, went back to sleep again.

"And I was feeling ashamed to take a boy's money!" ejaculated the man, as Ray picked up the bill with his own fifty cents.

"I'll bet you a dollar you can't get him back into the yard again," proposed Ray with a grin.

"Not much!" spoke up Mr. Johnson with conviction. "Lion knows when he's beaten, and he'll never come into this yard again, unless he is tied and dragged in. That's a safe bet."

And he never did. His memory of that one stab is ever fresh, and whenever Mr. Johnson turns into the Clayton barnyard, Lion leaps from the car and slinks off into the fields, where he remains until his master comes out again.

XII

THE GREBE FAMILY

Friends of mine have a summer home in northern Wisconsin, located on the bank of a tiny lake which gleams like a sapphire among the emerald pines that encircle it, and is clear and quite free from weeds except at one end, where there are rushes and reeds in abundance.

One day in June, while out canoeing, the boy of the family was prowling about in the rushes, when he brushed against a clump of them and uncovered some eggs. It was a little floating island of slimy rushes and mud, buoyed up by the bent-over reeds and flags upon which it had been built. Whenever we paddled the water with our hands the cradle rocked gently on the waves. It was but two inches above the water at the shallow brim, but as we found after the young birds were gone, it was almost as many feet below the surface. It was not such a fragile bit of débris as it appeared, but a great mass of materials held together by its own bulk. The cup of the nest, where the eggs lay, was at the water level, and the eggs were always more or less moist in consequence.

The eggs had been covered with some old rotted reeds, so carelessly careful that there was nothing artificial in their appearance to show that they were really the

coverlet of a grebe's cradle. There were six eggs, and fortunately none had been broken in the collision. Some were rolled wet side up, but those that remained dry side up were of a dirty, yellowish-white and more or less water-and-mud-stained.

We covered them again as best we could, and went up the bank to watch for the mother's return. When she appeared, about half an hour later, Tommy spied her first, sneaking along stealthily through the reeds,—a glossy black, white and gray bird, with a pale-blue bill crossed with a black band, which placed her as the pied-bill grebe. She swam in close to the nest, went around it suspiciously, but finally clambered up on the edge and stood there looking it over. She seemed more like a tiny little dark-brown, gray-vested kangaroo than a bird, with her short legs set back so far upon her body as to raise it almost upright when standing. She evidently suspected meddlesome hands had been at work, for after uncovering the eggs, and no doubt discovering those wet ones, or some rearrangement in their order, she backed off into the water. She sat looking about and muttering to herself in an odd, faint, cackling note.

"Zt!" threatened Tommy, and at the sound the grebe melted like a snowflake into the water, without a ripple to show where she had disappeared.

"Goodness, why doesn't she come up!" I whispered, after what seemed hours of watching the quiet water.

Soon Tommy pointed.

"She's peeping out at us behind that floating reed! See her eye, and her bill! Looks like a weed with a black bug on it, or what I imagine the periscope of a

submarine would look like. She's taking observations on us, too. Now watch. Zt!"

And both bug and weed were drawn out of sight beneath the water, with lightning speed, but without commotion.

"No wonder they have such an assortment of nicknames,—dabchick, water-witch, dipper, and hell-diver, and all implying deft and quick motion," I observed, looking everywhere for her to come up.

But this time we could not locate her, and not wishing to keep her in anxiety too long, we went back to the canoe and paddled off.

We were anxious to learn if the nest had been abandoned, and visited it several times the next day. We were not able to find any one at home; indeed, we had a hard time to locate the nest again on our first visit, so well were the eggs hidden and so little did the mass resemble a nest.

We wanted to surprise the mother brooding, too, provided she had not deserted the nest, but no matter how carefully we slipped down to the place, we always found it apparently just as we had left it. In fact, we had about decided that the grebe mother had left her eggs to their fate, until Tommy hit upon the plan of studying minutely the way the covering was placed over the eggs. One rotted reed-stem of a certain length laid so, and fresh saw-grass blades thrust up at such a place were found differently arranged the next time we called. By observing it several times in one day we found that the mother had visited the nest after our early morning call, which had probably driven her too soon from the eggs,

that she had remained away all day, but had been brooding when interrupted shortly before dark.

Beyond a doubt, during the sunny part of the day she left the eggs to be warmed by the steaming muck of the nest, but hovered over them at night. One cold, cloudy day, however, the reedy coverlid was arranged differently each of the five times we visited the nest, which told us that the mother was doing her parental duty in the absence of the fostering sun.

We were somewhat afraid such frequent calls might cause the mother to abandon the nest, but she stood loyally by in spite of our prying; no doubt she was often closely watching us as we leaned over the cradle, and perhaps the knowledge that inquisitive humans knew of it kept her more devoted than she naturally would have been.

Finally Tommy had the brilliant idea of covering his canoe with wire fencing and rushes, so we could carefully drift close to the nest. Thus hidden, we were able to study the mother brooding. She never failed to be gone when our boat neared the nest, but by staying there long enough, we were able to catch her when she came back. She would swim out from behind some reed where we had not suspected her of being hidden, and approach the nest cautiously. First with her beak she would lift aside the débris which covered the eggs, and pile it about the edge, out of her way and yet ready to hand when needed. Then she would creep into her place and settle down on the eggs. But though she might appear to have dozed off the squeak of a paddle or the shuffle of a foot would arouse her instantly. In the

twinkling of an eye she would slide into the water, cover the eggs with a few deft touches, and melt out of sight. When we were able to keep her in sight, it was amusing to see her hiding near the nest, with only a bright eye and her beak out of the water. When her alarm was over she would rise from the water, like a sprite, and go back to brooding.

Sometimes as she brooded, on cloudy days, she would call softly and plaintively, and her mate would appear. They would chat together for some time, and we even saw him contribute a few bits of plant refuse to the coverlid when fresh reeds were needed. He swam about in the rushes and broke off lengths, or stripped leaves from the stems. Once he dived, and after remaining out of sight for at least two minutes, he brought up a particularly mucky piece of flag stem for a choice stick of nursery furniture. Sometimes, of course, he appeared without being called, and one rainy afternoon we saw him catching minnows and water-bugs for his mate, who would not leave the eggs even for a short time.

We count it one of the best pieces of good luck that we were able to linger about the day the young appeared. When we drifted down to the nest early one day, three of the little ones were out, and before an hour was up two more hatched out. By the time these two were out the first three were already dry and sitting on the edge of the cradle, anxious for a swim.

A baby grebe is one of the cunningest of new-born things, not even excepting a piggie. There they perched, little roly-poly striped bodies of yellowish brown held bolt upright, big downy heads capped with the striped

material of their jackets thrown back to balance their swaggering yellow-white breasts, and their big dark eyes staring at the great world before them. It was a sight to make one love grebes for all time.

The parents were not in sight when we arrived, but they soon appeared and hovered about their squeaking offspring, softly admonishing them to have patience.

For hours we sat cramped in the canoe, scarcely daring to wave off the gnats, so anxious were we to see the sextette leave the crib. At last, about noon, the five, now in a row on the edge of the nest, refused to wait any longer, and one after another they toppled off into the water. No need to worry about them,—they apparently could not sink, and bobbed there as lightly as so many powder-puffs, and as unconcerned as grown-ups. They floated about, close to their loving parents, who appeared determined to remain near the cradle until that last baby appeared. Once the mother peered into the nest as if to assure herself there was a living grebeling in the egg, and then she went back to the little flock in the water.

At last she murmured softly to them, and one by one they got aboard; or rather, she depressed herself just below the water and floated underneath them, and scooped them up on her back. It was an interesting demonstration of maternal love and diplomacy, her knowing when the little ones were tired. They rested on her back for some time, while she swam slowly about in the reeds, nabbing a fly here and a water-bug there, which she fed to the little flock on her back. Out would shoot her smoke-gray head and beak, and seldom were

the little ones disturbed in the least by her quick motion, so careful was she not to move her body. We were much amused to see one little fellow, who had risen partially on his feet as if debating a swim, or a catch, of his own, suddenly sit down as Mother Grebe reached up into a flag stem for a luscious dragon-fly. But perhaps she shook him down purposely.

A tidbit once captured, she would turn her head and thrust the food into a gaping little pied-bill all ready for it. She was careful not to feed the same baby each time, but distributed her favors with a beak impartially tender.

An incautious movement in the canoe made Mother Grebe all apprehension. But she did not lose her presence of mind, even with five little ones on her back. Not she. Up came her wings, and closed above the brood like a sheltering roof, and she sank out of sight as deftly and silently as if alone. We fully expected to see little downy grebelings come to the surface, like so many water-casks from a sunken ship. But no, there was scarcely a ripple to show where the mother and her babies had melted into the water, and no débris to betray the sinking.

After a time, as we made no disturbance, she came around from beside the nest, her wings still meeting over her back. When she lowered them there were the little grebes, as wide awake and unruffled as though nothing unusual had happened. Indeed, even their thick fluffy down was scarcely more moist and clinging than their mother's waterproof cloak.

Tommy just had to have lunch at that point, but we

made it as hasty as possible, and drifted grebeward, not to miss any of their babyhood hours. All we saw of the family when we returned was one little fellow sitting upright on the edge of the cradle, as if wondering where his wandering family might be. Eventually the mother appeared, and the five little ones came out from behind reed stems and floating sticks, and the family was reunited.

Later in the day, when the grebelings were bobbing about in the water, we witnessed a lesson in diving. The mother would swim under a youngster and rise with it on her back. Then with a backward reach of her wing tip, she would slip it under the little fellow and pick him off her back, lift him several inches in the air, and then with a dexterous flip pitch him off head-first into the water. The little ones took this spring-board practice as they had all the events of the day, and made no fuss at all over it. Since it was a part of their business of life to learn to dive, they stoically did it, and not one of the six flopped or floundered, or fell, but took the plunge neatly and quietly. The mother put force enough into that flip she gave them to make them go entirely out of sight, and either the drive kept them progressing under water, or they kicked out with their lobed propellers, for they came up some little distance from the mother, beyond where they had gone under.

Again and again the little fellows in turn must have a try at diving, and we no longer marveled at the speed and neatness with which grown birds do it, when we saw that the grebeling must commence to learn diving the first day of its life. But we did not see them dive with-

out this impetus from the mother's wing; perhaps their heads were too big, or their bodies too light to get under the water without a spring-board start.

And when some noise we made alarmed the family the mother dived with the little one that chanced to be on her back, but those in the water, instead of going under, struck off into the reeds as fast as their little legs could paddle them. Evidently the diving was more difficult than swimming, and their first impulse was to hurry out of sight behind some protecting stalk rather than strike downward. In fact, we saw the family about the lake for several days thereafter, and we never noticed the little ones voluntarily diving, although they must have learned it in time and become as successful at it as their parents.

After the first day the grebelings had no more food poked into their mouths. Instead, they must learn to help themselves; so, after catching an insect, the mother would toss it among the group and the one that got to it first had it. One of them just couldn't seem to get there first, so after two or three rounds had left it still unfed the tender-hearted mother went over close to it and laid a bug right under its nose. It was the first that time, you may be sure.

If the children had any lessons in flying, we did not witness them, although on one occasion we did notice a grebeling attempt to use its wings. It had been resting and feeding on its mother's back, when it suddenly decided to paddle its own canoe. It drew itself to its full height, and instead of diving off its mother's back, as they had learned to do when voluntarily taking to the

water, this one gave its infinitesimal wings a few flaps and scrambled off into the water. But a little grebe, although such an independent creature from birth, must, like all young birds, wait for wing feathers to grow and breast muscles to harden before it can make any successful attempts at flight. So the mother wisely teaches it first to dive, as a means of escaping danger. Or the parents rather, for the father tried to do his share of educating and caring for his family, and if the mother was the more attentive, it was only because of the hours of planning she had spent while lingering about the eggs. He, too, foraged for food, distributed it impartially, made a spring-board of his wing, and an excursion boat of his back, and copied the mother's tactics as best he could.

It was an interesting and pleasant acquaintance we had with our grebe friends, although a little one-sided, perhaps, since they gave us so much pleasure and we did so little for them. We saw the small powder-puffs grow rapidly larger and stronger and more accomplished, and less dependent on their parents for food and protection. We saw them put on waterproof coats of plumage over their fluffy down pyjamas, and grow wing feathers strong enough to bear their weight. And that last change carried them out of the lake altogether, and we saw them no more after they were able to rise from the water.

XIII

FLOCK SPIRIT

How does a great flock of birds maintain its discipline? What enables them to move so simultaneously? How are orders issued? Are they organized like an army, with a chief and his subordinates, down to squad leaders? Whatever "flock spirit" may be, wild ducks have it highly developed, as one can learn by watching a group of them for a short time.

One day late in August, a friend and I happened to have a few hours between trains at Devil's Lake. So we took the car that trundles along over the flat alkaline prairie which was once lake bed, but now separates the town from its watery beach by several long miles. We had intended to see the lake, of course, but once there we found ourselves in the position of Yankee Doodle,—we couldn't see the lake because there were so many spoonbills.

There was a strong wind blowing, and when we came in sight of the lake we saw waves rising and falling throughout the sweep of its dark surface. In a little curve of the shore-line I spied what looked like a scum of weeds, or débris of chips or leaves, floating dark against the dancing, glistening gleam of sunlight on the waves.

"The wind has stirred the lake considerably," I remarked to my companion, indicating this débris.

The conductor, collecting our fares just then, smiled and asked: "What do you think that is?"

"Why, weeds,—or chips."

"It's wild ducks,—shovelers," he corrected dryly.

"Spoonbills," amended a fellow passenger. "They are thick on the lake to-day. They have been coming in to feed for days now."

And then, looking more closely, I saw the men were right. It was the dark, mottled duck-backs, reflecting light here and there, which had deceived me into thinking them weeds, or chips. But so closely were they crowded together that "scum" still described their appearance even after I knew what they really were.

We passed several such flocks on the way along the lake-shore, and saw many ducks, on the wing and feeding, by ones and twos and in flocks. I was secretly planning to walk back to get a nearer view of those birds, but when we left the car it was to find ourselves close upon the largest flock of all. The boat-houses and landings at this point of the beach make a good breakwater for a shallow curve on beyond them, and there the water seemed literally alive with ducks.

There was a general alarm and scurry when we appeared, and I feared they would all leave. Their uneasiness was but momentary, however, and soon all had settled down. We got in the lee of a boat-house and for an hour amused ourselves by watching and studying the flock.

Each bird was feeding, head buried in the water and only its mottled back shining above the surface. They rocked up and down on the waves in a long line about

thirty feet out from the shore-line, where, so we decided, the undertow kept their food backed up for them, just beneath the surface of the water. Each duck seemed to be swimming as it fed, for there was a general progression, orderly and slow but still perceptible. It was interesting to notice that they faced toward the wind but tacked off slightly to the side, that they managed to keep headed toward the crest of the waves, and yet to steer off in a line parallel with them and bent slightly to match the curve of the shore-line. This they did by swimming sideways. And they kept their nice formation in line with heads buried in the water, and in the teeth of a strong wind.

But in spite of these precautions the force of the waves would soon bank them into a compact, narrow line. So, when their quarters became too crowded, there would be a sudden general flutter and scurry, and the mass had widened several feet directly out over the incoming waves. These flights were beautiful and of never-ending interest. There would be that dark line of scum on the water, and the next instant, as if by signal, it turned into hundreds of fluttering pinions,—the dark backs and white breasts, now seen and now covered by the burring wings, making that characteristic twinkling flight of the wild duck which is always a delight to the beholder. Their passage was low and brief, however, and had the effect of shaking a twisted veil and dropping it wide-spread. Then each duck became individualized, and danced up and down on the water like a bit of cork,—or a black dot in the veil. Down would go every head as soon as the flock had

settled again, and after a few moments the line had become narrowed and thickened as before. Again there would be that simultaneous scattering and twinkling and settling, and the feeding would be resumed. It was a beautiful demonstration of harmonious "flock spirit."

There were other evidences of order in their feeding. My companion noticed that the end of the line kept just so far from the long boat landing which made them such an ideal breakwater, and which doubtless made the undertow less marked and therefore provided less food. We soon discovered that when a bird had reached within ten or fifteen feet of the landing, he curved out and toward the center of the lake, and paddled back in the opposite direction from that in which he had been feeding, and toward the foot of the long line. He would swim back this way several feet, or even yards, and then drop into an opening in the line and commence feeding along toward the head again. Or sometimes, by ones or twos or dozens, those who had reached the extreme head of the line would rise and fly back toward the rear. This circling about gave the flock the curious milling effect of a small whirlpool in the waves, and was another cause of that bunching in their ranks which had to be shaken out every now and then.

There must have been some watchful eye on guard. For once, when I raised my folded parasol to use as an index finger, pointing out some peculiar formation I had noticed, there was the same general scurry and alarm which greeted our appearance, and differing noticeably from the scattering flight in which they periodically indulged, being higher and longer and swifter.

"They took that umbrella for a gun-barrel," laughed my companion. "When they get settled again, try it over."

I did so, several times at varying intervals, with the same result. Surely the majority of these birds were spring hatched,—was it some instinct that told them to fear a weapon they had not yet seen? And in that protected season and place? Or was some "sooner" to blame for this premature information? Or was some experienced old bird on the watch for the persecution which would be theirs a week hence? We could hear no orders given, but the orderliness of the flock betrayed some sort of organization and leadership.

Presently we noticed that the line was gradually being re-formed. Those at the tail end of the long line seemed to be flying up and settling down in front of the ranks, and nearer the head. Every once in a while a part of the flock would make this lapping over flight, without seeming to disturb those ahead of them, and independently of them.

"It's that girl coming along the beach there, by that fringe of trees," explained my companion. "They seem to want to keep just so far away from her."

They did keep approximately out of her range, and when she neared us, those in front arose in successive groups and flew back and settled in the rear of the procession.

"Pretty clever work," applauded my companion.

"How many are there here, do you think?" I asked.

"Well, we'll count off fifty here at this end, com-

mencing after they have spread out well, and taking in every bird the width of the line."

So we started together, and counted the number off silently.

"Fifty!" we finished almost in the same breath.

"Didn't get very far down the line, did you?" asked my companion.

"Perhaps three feet," I replied.

"Now, let's check them off in groups by this measure, and see what we get."

I estimated fifteen and my companion eighteen of these groups. So, according to this rough calculation, there were about a thousand ducks feeding there in that one flock.

It would be interesting to know how the news of this banquet spread in spoonbill circles, for every few minutes new individuals would twinkle in by ones and twos and half-dozens, from across the lake. But as occasional stragglers grew discontented with the company or satiated with good things, and left the banquet hall, no doubt they were the tale-bearers. These new ones that came in usually flew to the rear of the line and joined the ranks there, though sometimes they stopped somewhere on the way between the head and foot of the procession, settling down usually to lakeward. Sometimes, a single bird would feed at a little distance from the ranks, farther into the lake, but this was not common. The majority of them seemed to be making this a real banquet, with sociability prominently featured.

We examined some of the weeds washed up on the beach, and found the plant to have a white succulent

stem, round and tough and somewhat elastic, about the size of a firm cotton cord, rather spicy and sweetish to the taste. At the Biological Laboratory we were given the name eel-grass, tape-grass, or wild celery, and were told that just before the hunting season opens the lake becomes a favorite banquet ground for ducks of all kinds. First come the redheads and mallards; they dive and pull the wrack up by the roots and eat its juicy sweet bulb. Then the spoonbills come later in swarms and feed on the floating, water-logged stems, so crisp and spicy and succulent.

A week later, when every man and boy thereabouts had turned hunter and was bringing in his daily quota of ducks, I was glad to remember that the birds had had one glorious banquet before they became a banquet themselves.

XIV

CRADLES IN ADOBE

HAVE you ever happened to notice that the cliff swallow will not live anywhere and everywhere? There is a reason for the way these birds establish their crowded villages in some localities and are utterly unknown in others. King Duncan, approaching Macbeth's castle, observed the house martins nesting on every corner and jutty and buttress, and commented:

> "This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet, does approve
> By his loved mansionry, that the heaven's breath
> Smells wooingly here. . . .
> Where they much breed and haunt, I have observ'd,
> The air is delicate."

The American cliff swallow is just as particular in the matter of locality as his European cousin, though his choice is not based on the quality of the air to be found there, but on the quality of the soil. He is a mason, and one of the best of his trade: as he makes all his bricks without straw, however, he is naturally very choice of what materials he uses. He knows that a sandy soil is useless to him, that a rich black loam is not much better, that a sticky clay is just right. So when he finds a deposit of good adobe clay, he feels bound to use it.

I remember a steep river-bank that rivaled Macbeth's castle in the number of its swallow nests. Rows of them stretched from side to side across the cliff, tiers of them ranged up and down, like the windows of a sky-scraper or immense apartment house. And the busy birds went back and forth, each guided by some unerring instinct to its own nest in the crowded colony, just like city dwellers of the human sort, although each home looked just like the rest.

I once watched a busy crowd of the birds at their work. They found their clay in a ravine not far away. Standing on the damp clay, the little mason, or brick-maker, would lift his wings high above his head, no doubt to keep them clean and out of the way. He would seem to be rooting in the clay with his beak, much as a pig grubs out goobers, and to be scratching with his feet like a hen, sometimes alternately working with beak and claws, and sometimes with all three together. When he had a mouthful, he would roll it about on the ground with his beak. Saliva was doubtless mixed with the clay while working it thus: ornithologists say that such is the case.

"And the swallow, to help man invent,
Revealed the best way to economize clay,
And bricks to combine with cement."

When he had a round ball of clay, about the size of a "commie," he would fly up to the nest he was building, or repairing, on the cliff face. After working there a moment, sticking the ball in place, back he would come for more clay. He used no straw or grass in the adobe, nor

did I ever find a cliff swallow's nest that had it, though the barn swallow makes this material prominent in his building.

The nests I examined had a peculiar warty appearance, showing the joining of the different balls of clay. One could almost count the number used in making a nest, although their adjoining edges had been more or less blended in the process. The nests were uniformly bottle-shaped, larger at the bottom than at the top, with an opening in the side near the roof. From the circle left on the rock when a nest was broken off, I was convinced that the bird started with a layer laid around the wall, and then worked outward to the doorway. One old nest which I examined had been neatly lined with feathers and grass, though this does not always seem to be the rule. The most of them crumbled easily, if struck, though some were harder than others. This was doubtless due to the quality of the mud or the amount of saliva used, as a streak of sand or loam in the clay, or too little saliva, would tend to make the nest more friable.

The cliff swallow usually builds under a sheltering ledge, proof that he knows his shiftlessness in making his bricks without straws causes them to crumble easily, and to jellify sufficiently enough to "run" when moistened.

He is the eaves swallow, also, in America, the change of name being due to his change of habits. Although the ancient writers stated that there are two untameable animals, the fly and the swallow, this is no longer true in the sense of domestication, since the housefly has learned to profit by the easy foraging found in garbage

cans and such débris, while the cliff swallow has recognized the value to him of man's peculiar way of shaping a roof. So he moved from the cliff to the eaves, and by doing so received a new name in human circles.

He knows that sheltered eaves make much better and safer sites than exposed cliffs, and so, whenever he finds it practicable, he fastens his adobe under some rafter. In such cases, he does not always build the bottle-shaped nest so suitable to cliff sites, but adapts the shape of his nest to accommodate its location. Some are bowl-shaped, some pocket-shaped, and others are saddled, according to the site.

A man tells me that twenty years ago eaves swallows almost took possession of his farm buildings, making themselves a nuisance about the place all summer long. There was a small lake not far away, banked with a soft, sticky clay, and the mere sight of it seemed to make the birds fairly wild to be using it. A perfect mania for nest-building took possession of the birds every spring. Each exposed rafter and eave ledge on the farm had its corresponding adobe. From mid-May to September the birds chattered and shrieked all day long about their domestic duties of building a cradle and rearing a family or two, and in between times they seemed to build nests for pleasure, as many of them turned out to be "bachelor nests" constructed for pastime rather than bassinets for babies.

It was useless to try to drive the birds away. One could knock down all the nests he could reach, and by the time he had made the rounds the first ones were being rebuilt. About ten years ago, however, the lake was

drained and cultivated, which had a marked effect on the eaves swallow colony. The first year some of the old nests were used, but many were run-down and "to let." By the third summer the swallows had deserted the vicinity, because there was no more clay with which to build or repair.

XV

COMMUTING TERNS

LATE in August, when all North Dakota stood in shocks and the farmers were already starting their fall plowing, we had occasion to travel in the forenoon of a perfect summer day.

We passed field after field in which almost every shock of grain had a tern perched on its apex, like the weathercock on a barn. Occasionally, two of the black-capped, pearl-gray-coated birds would be mounted on the same shock, but usually those that could not find a pile of grain for themselves were feeding directly from the stubble, like so many chickens feeding in the grass. Indeed, those on the shocks were posing rather than eating, in the majority of cases; perhaps they flew there for a siesta and to digest their meal after feeding. Since they are insect eaters, they were doubtless foraging the fields over in search of crickets and grasshoppers and such small game to be found about and in the shocks, and were not plundering the heads of grain to any undue extent.

Sometimes, as the train passed, there would be a general alarm, and then it would look as though a blizzard of gigantic flakes was sweeping over the field. In the bright sunlight, the birds were a beautiful sight, in their light grayish-blue mantles touched with black on the wings, and forked tail, in their black caps with neck

piece, silvery gray vests, and beak and feet of coral red. In flight they looked, as Dr. Coues describes them in his book, "curiously like colossal mosquitoes," holding their beaks at right angles with the body instead of poking them forward in a straight line with the tail, as most birds carry the beak when a-wing. The downward turned beak, of the same pale orange red as the feet and legs, made the bird seem like some three-legged flying apparatus, except for the bright eyes looking out of the one end.

Their flight makes one long for wings, so free and dashing and swallow-like it is. Once in a while, through an open window, even above the noise of the train, I could hear their wild, vague, restless calls, which seem inspired by the grinding and lashing of waves rather than by the quiet August grain fields. But it is such an out-of-door sound that it cannot be inappropriate anywhere. With a wind blowing over the wheat, or across the empty autumnal fields, their cry must seem a part of the landscape.

Their manner of alighting was interesting. The birds continually varied the appearance of the tail when flying; sometimes it looked forked, sometimes so thin as to seem but one single feather. When hovering it was wide-spread and almost even in outline of edge, but upon settling the edges were bent upward, and with their wide-spread wings upraised and almost touching over the back, they had the appearance of big butterflies gently poising on the ground.

When we passed a field of summer fallow which the farmer was plowing, it appeared almost as if he were

working in a storm of snowballs, so thickly did the terns follow along behind him to gather up the bugs and grubs the plowshare turned up. There was a veritable "feast of the terns" in the wake of that plow. The birds were almost as tame as chickens, and kept close behind the plow to catch their prey before it could creep out of sight.

We took the afternoon train back, and again passed the flocks feeding. Then we had an hour's wait, and while standing on the platform we watched the terns returning homeward from their feast. It was then about seven o'clock, and gray-black clouds had stretched themselves over the sky. Against the dark background the white tern breasts glistened like silver.

They traveled in long, V-shaped lines, like geese, but quietly, and with very little wing motion. As flock after flock went over, all going toward the lakes to the west where they had been hatched, they resembled the edges of cloud banks driven by the wind, or white-capped rollers flowing rhythmically along one after another. The size of the flocks varied, and sometimes a belated individual, or a couple or half-dozen, went hurrying past, but usually there were from fifty to sixty birds in each V. They kept a uniform height, probably two hundred feet up, perhaps because that level offered less resistance, or they found a favoring air-current there. Those individuals that flew lower seemed to make more wing-motion than those in the flocks.

Scores of these flocks went along as we watched, and we estimated that several thousand terns commuted homeward above our heads that evening.

XVI

A FRIENDLY CALL

One summer afternoon my brother and I were sitting out in the yard, near one end of the front porch, reading aloud. All at once, between the lines of "Treasure Island," my attention was caught by a commanding "Chirp!" near by, and looking up, I saw a young robin standing on the edge of the porch floor, between two spindles, gazing at us with the utmost friendliness.

"How-do!" he chirped again, and with his big head cocked to one side so his big bright eyes could observe us well, he reminded me of a stray child asking for attention and favors.

We did not know where he had come from, for we had not known of any robin nests in the yard. Yet it was unmistakably a young bird, for his plump yellowish-white vest had dark freckles on it and "robin" was betrayed in every turn of his head, every tone of his voice, every movement and posture.

"How-do!" he inquired again, looking us bravely and cordially in the eye as he squatted there on the porch floor not far away.

"Hel-lo!" my brother chirped back at him, imitating his call as best he could and which was not at all bad.

After a few such greetings had been exchanged be-

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

ROBIN

tween the two, our caller spread his stubby, half-feathered winglets and partly flew, partly tumbled down on the ground beside the porch. When my brother called again he answered brightly, and came on a few more hops, then he paused with his head on one side and studied us inquisitively; and so he approached us by leaps and stops until he was perched on the toe of Brother's shoe. Brother then began chirping to him encouragingly, very anxious to have the little fellow hop up into his lap. Young Robin appeared inclined to do so, but had a childish coyness about being too ready to obey. There he perched, sometimes answering Brother's chirps with others equally friendly, sometimes merely cocking his head and cogitating the plan with a great show of wisdom, sometimes closing his eyes and making pretense of taking a nap then and there. Once or twice, instead of chirping, he lazily stretched a wing and a leg, and yawned full in our faces, as if bored by the whole affair.

Evidently he was a spoiled nestling who had been accustomed to having his own way in the nest, and did not propose to yield too quickly to any human coaxing. Having undertaken an independent journey into the world he intended to govern his goings and comings as best suited his infantile mind.

At last, when Brother was chirping to him to come up higher, and the little mite seemed disposed to do so, I spoiled Brother's plan, by chirping to the sociable youngster myself. It was an imperfect and far from pleasing imitation of his own chirp, and merited nothing but scornful silence. But Robinet showed himself

possessed of a sense of humor, or a heart of sympathy, for he cocked his head and looked my way, and after I had repeated the comical chirp a few times, he deliberately backed off Brother's foot, hopped over the ground to me, where I sat in the hammock, and by a series of leaps was finally nestled cozily in my lap!

Not to be outdone, Brother tried to distract his attention all the while Robin was making for my lap, but the little bird knew what he wanted and would not be coaxed away. Whether he admired the color of my pink dress more than Brother's dark trousers, or whether my lap looked safer and more inviting, or he took pity on my poor attempts to chirp, he hopped along from my foot up to my knees and into my lap. Perhaps my raising my feet from the ground helped him by doing away with some of the steep ascent,—that was Brother's explanation. At any rate, Brother could not call him back, or out of my lap, and finally resumed his reading. Robinet made no motion to leave, and dozed off to sleep in the most thrilling chapter of "Treasure Island."

He was such an odd little morsel of down and feathers mingled almost equally half and half. His breast was down mixed with feathers, and all through his stubby feathered wings and tail rags of down were peeping out, giving him a sort of ragamuffin, or lost-child, appearance quite appealing. His unkemptness and his air of supreme confidence in us made our hearts go out to him, while one of his steadfast, appraising stares from great round eyes made us long to be found worthy of that trust. He still had his baby roundness and dimples, showing his helplessness and need of grown-up care; but

his swaggering manner of standing upright with legs far apart and looking the world full in the eye hinted of a masculine independence fast developing. He was much like a baby in rompers learning to walk.

Finally we decided on a walk and then we had a new problem on our hands. Like the child who freely and frankly adopts itself into the care and keeping of utter strangers, and is as hard to get rid of as he was easy to acquire, Robinet refused to leave us. Every time we would place him in a tree he would refuse to cling to the branch, and in our tender-heartedness we could not consent to let him tumble to the ground, but would catch him in our hands at the slightest hint of his losing his balance. He would stay on the branch as long as we held him there, contentedly viewing the world over our heads, or dozing off into cat-naps, whichever struck his fancy at the moment. But as soon as the sheltering hand was removed, he toppled so dangerously that we could not do otherwise than let him hop off into our hands once more.

At last he hopped off the branch into my hair, where he found a safe retreat as long as he was determined to remain, since I would by no means allow him to be dragged off by main force, and he would leave in no other way. He had a good grip, and felt secure, and there he remained.

To my great relief, Brother eventually hit upon the plan of gathering ripe raspberries for Robinet and feeding him from his hand. This succeeded in coaxing him off my head, but made him all the more determined not to take to the tree. Fortunately while we were schem-

ing how to get our caller tactfully disposed of, reinforcements arrived. He had been missed by his loving father, who all at once appeared in an ash tree near by, and chirped wistfully to his offspring. Robinet paid no attention to him, either by replying to his anxious calls or by turning his obstinate head in that direction, although when we had chirped to him he had paid good heed. For baby persistence and wilfulness, Robinet was the worst I have ever seen, human or feathered.

So we decided to help Father Robin reclaim his young hopeful. We carried Robinet over to the ash tree, which branched some feet from the ground into a wide and nest-shaped crotch. We set him carefully therein, and before he could crawl to the edge and threaten to commit suicide by throwing himself headlong to earth, just to tempt us to catch him, as he had persisted in doing heretofore, we took to our heels and put a good distance between us and the tree.

From afar we watched Father Robin fly down and coax his son, first with voice and then with food, until he induced the reluctant youngster to go away with him, up to the top branches, then across into another tree, and so by easy stages off toward home. As we fully deserved it, we were not surprised that Robinet forgot us as soon as we were out of his sight, and that he never returned to renew the acquaintance. Or perhaps Father Robin realized that if he was to rear his venturesome son to years of discretion, he must take better care of him in the future, and saw to it that Robinet went adventuring alone no more.

XVII

"CARUSO"

We live right in the heart of the city, and yet a walk of three blocks in a direction at right angles to the downtown route brings us to a wilderness of rocks and underbrush, several acres in extent. We can climb up the rocky bluff and sit looking down at the switch yards below, and yet hear song-sparrows all about us. Or we can turn our backs to the bay and imagine ourselves far out in the country, alone with the birds. That is the best thing I know about a song-sparrow,—give him a bush and a rock, and he will bring his rippling wild-wood music right into the city and make himself at home there immediately.

Along in April my sister and I always commence going "up on the rocks" every evening to listen to the song-sparrows. Midway of this wilderness the granite piles crack into a deep ravine, where grow shrubs of all sorts. This ravine is a veritable paradise of song-sparrows, and scores of them nest there every year. They come early, often before the snow is quite gone, and their trickling songs resemble a musical fantasia descriptive of the threads of water rippling down over the rocks on their way to the lake. For the song-sparrow seems to feel the herald's joy of proclaiming spring's arrival, just as the robin takes the gossip's delight in announcing that she is on her way.

No two song-sparrow tunes sound just alike, by the way. It is as though each was a gifted improvisor in his own right, and had composed a recitative or musical anecdote, and was adding whatever decorations suited his taste. Their songs vary in construction, in phrasing, in pitch, in duration, delivery, expression, but almost without exception there will be a fine trill somewhere in the song. It may be at the beginning, or at the end, or in the middle, but usually it is there somewhere, although not invariably. So, during these song-sparrow concerts, we not only enjoy the music as a whole, but take pleasure in distinguishing, and comparing, the various offerings.

Yet, although the bushes were full of song-sparrows, and each one was singing a tune of his own, my sister and I had a favorite songster all last spring, who, be it confessed, seemed rather fond of us.

We first noticed Caruso, as we named him, one evening, perched in the most conspicuous place he could find for a recital platform. There he stood, on the tip-top twig of the highest tree about, a gangling young poplar. Although the tree and the ground beneath were already in shade, the setting sun lighted him brightly and made his dull brown plumage glow richly. His head was thrown back, and he was trilling away until one could almost see the air about him quiver with melody.

He repeated what seemed to be the same strain over and over, half a dozen times or more. When he stopped he was answered by a companion that was singing in a low bush not far away, but higher up the hill. He listened attentively, until the second songster had fin-

urtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

SONG SPARROW

ished, then sang his song all over, verses and chorus. There was a short silence when he had finished, before the second songster replied with his own individual strain. It was as though the two were carrying on a musical dialogue, for each sang a different melody, and each waited for the other to cease singing before beginning his own lines. And this they kept up for some moments.

But the first singer was by far the more brilliant performer; he was a minstrel who, having composed a perfect gem of a song, was so proud of it that he must run it over many times without stopping. The complete strain was remarkably original, even for a song-sparrow, and these birds are noted for the striking differences in individual performances. This bird had a tune very prolonged, lively and complicated, like a coloratura passage from Donizetti. He would run over several trills, rising higher and higher until he stopped on a remarkably sweet, high note; after holding it for several counts, he would slide down to a lower note, pause there and trill until his voice resembled the vibration of a tense wire; then he would run back again and end abruptly on the high note.

The other song-sparrow was partial to a soft, continuous trill in an andante movement, very sweet and pleasing but not so brilliant as song-sparrow tunes in general and his rival's on the poplar tree in particular. Still, he was fond of his little lyric, and matched it with the other's florid recitative for some time, before flying away.

"Now listen," warned my sister, when the little fellow

on the poplar twig had stopped for breath, and she whistled a soft trill back at him.

He turned his head in surprise, cocked it on one side, and with his bright eye glancing all about for the source of that unbirdlike echo, listened to her attentively. Even after she stopped, he kept this attitude for some seconds, looking here and there suspiciously for the insect or animal which might have produced the noise. Presently, as he did not hear it again, he went on with his song, announcing to every one within hearing that he was a "cheer-y—cheer-y—cheer-y cheer-y cheery-cheery lit-tle dear-ie!"

Finally he stopped, whereupon my sister whistled to him as before.

He glanced all about, but did not seem able to associate us two brown bumps on the gray rock with that disturbing echo. Again he sang, but not for long, and when he paused he tilted his head on one side to listen for that mysterious sound. That made us laugh, and not being able to whistle back at him, my sister had to let him wait for his echo. Fearing nothing, he tilted his head back and sang his song through once more. As soon as he paused, my sister managed to whistle back at him. Upon catching her response, he tilted his head inquiringly, as if asking of himself: "Now what can it be?" But he answered her, paused, and listened, just as though he had been singing a duet with another bird.

The next time my sister whistled to him, however, he showed that he suspected us to be the most likely cause of it, for he left his tree and hopped into a bush somewhat nearer to us, and sang directly at us, head lifted

high. Each time he stopped singing he appeared to challenge my sister to come in with her solo and would listen for it. Then when she finished he would answer with a long and lovely passage from his cadenza.

"Now watch him!" laughed my sister, and when it was her turn to respond, she didn't make a sound.

Thereupon the song-sparrow waited, his head on one side and his eye rolled up at her. Still she didn't answer.

"Quick, quick!" he chirped at her, in a very business-like call note that had none of his sweet trills in it.

This made my sister laugh, and before she could pucker up her mouth to obey, he chirped again encouragingly and a trifle impatiently, so we thought: "Quick, quick!"

As soon as she could stop laughing at him, she whistled back, and immediately thereafter he took up his blithe, highly ornamented aria.

As long as we sat there on the rock that evening, he kept up this dialogue with my sister. But when we arose to go he flitted off into the brush, his wild-bird timidity overcoming his camaraderie as soon as we moved.

The next evening we wondered if we should see him again. At first we did not, but soon we recognized his peculiar song and found him perched on his high poplar branch, bathed in sunset glow and running over his medley of trills and quips. When he stopped my sister whistled to him. At once he was all attention, and when she whistled a second time, he flew over to the same low bush near us, and announced himself ready for the sport.

Thereafter, for several weeks, whenever we went up on the rocks, we enjoyed a *conversazione* with Caruso. We grew to love the little fellow very much, with his cheerful song and confiding ways, and were very sorry when the care of his nestlings, or some accident, deprived us of his company. No dozen song-sparrows, no matter how musical, could quite take the place of this one little friend.

These musical dialogues between two song-sparrows are a habit with the species, I believe, for one mild sunny spring morning I sat for more than an hour beside a wooded creek in one of our suburban parks, listening to two song-sparrows carrying on a singing bout. One was perched on the topmost twig of a young unleaved poplar, on one side of the rippling creek, and the other was on the other side and hidden from view among the pines. But they sang back and forth with monotonous regularity, each religiously respecting the other's turn and as carefully heeding his own. The one nearest me, and the one I could see, had the louder, clearer song, but that was perhaps because it was not muffled by branches, as was the other bird's voice. This difference in the two voices, one loud and ringing and the other soft and subdued, coming in alternately, made the concert most pleasing, and with the stream rippling down over the rocks for an orchestral accompaniment, was the most fitting music possible for the radiant, thawing, coming-to-life-again April morning.

XVIII

CHICKADEES AT WORK

My sister and I were in the park one Saturday morning late in April. The creek was running free and strong, the sun was pulling the grass-blades from the ground and the leaves from their jackets, and making the fern fronds unroll their fuzzy furs,—just the sort of morning to inspire birds to nest-building, and humans to sit beside the water and enjoy perfect idleness.

After a time we noticed that scraps and splinters of fresh white punk were coming down the creek. Two of them were lodged in an eddy around a rock, and others were floating past us at intervals. Curious as to where they were coming from, we went up the creek a short distance, passing several other scraps on the way. When we lost sight of the splinters, we sat down on a rock at the base of a big pine, and watched for anything that might develop here.

"So that's the secret," laughed my sister, pointing out a long-tailed, short-winged bird in cadet-gray coat and black cap, which came out from a clump of white birches across the creek, paused over the stream ten or a dozen feet above the water, dropped the white chip he carried in his beak, and whirled back to the birches in characteristic bobby flight. "It's a chickadee carpentering out its nest."

We trained our glasses on the birches, but could see nothing. So we went around by the bridge and came upon the clump from the opposite direction. Then we could make out the birds, at work on a white birch tree, about five feet up the trunk where a dead branch had broken off and left an upright stub about two feet long. The little carpenter was clinging to the stump, and cutting a round little opening in the side with his sturdy beak. The hole was about half-way up the stub, and was already well started into the pithy wood. The little fellow worked until he had chipped off a good-sized scrap, then flew away with it to the creek and dropped it into the water. He had no sooner left the stub than his mate flew down and went to work in her turn.

When the first chickadee returned, it perched on the top of the stub and advised in soft pleasant chatter to "Chip away, Chip away, Chick-a-dee-dear." And when the mate flew away with her scrap of débris, the one that had been advising and resting went to work.

We camped on a stone not far away, and watched the work proceed. About noon the little workmen disappeared, as humans do, and they must have laid off for the day, as we saw no more of them or of their work from that time on, although we lingered about for some time, and even returned later in the afternoon to see if they had continued their chiseling.

When both flew away, and remained away for some moments, we felt safe in going over to examine their excavation. It was most neatly done, as far as they had gone, and not a scrap of bark or wood, not even a tiny

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

CHICKADEE

flake of sawdust was to be seen on the ground below. Any one passing would not have guessed what was going on in the trees, with all tell-tale scraps safely deposited in the creek.

The hole was through the bark and about an inch of the wood, and had already started its downward trend. Four hours later we went back to look at the nest, and it was in the same condition, proving that the little workers were either taking the afternoon off or had abandoned it altogether because they had seen us looking it over.

The next morning about nine o'clock we went to the clump of birches again, and found the pair at work. We were glad they had not abandoned the nest, and watched them for some time. It was interesting to observe the progress they made, for the birds sank deeper and deeper out of sight until the next day, when we called upon them, only their rumps and long tails and wing-tips were to be seen sticking out of the nest.

They had the nest finished after about a week of morning toil. It was then seven inches deep, and upon probing it with a hooked wire we brought up a good bit of creamy, matted fluff,—the down of young fern fronds. That was all the nest contained then that we could dig up, and that the inside was swept neat and clean was proved by the fact that none of the down we fished out showed chips or sawdust. We put the dainty mattress back and pressed it down with a twig, and hoped the parents would not notice that humans had been meddling with their cradle.

Two days later there was an egg to be felt in the nest,

and the number increased every day thereafter. We were now eager to see the eggs, and so copied a plan we had learned other bird-observers have used: We sawed off the top of the stub an inch above the edge of the door, then chiseled out the center. By reflecting a light into the cavity, while standing on a ladder, we could see the seven rosy-white eggs with their many rust-brown freckles. We hinged the stub back into place with a strip of leather, and caught it firmly down with a cord looped over a knot below.

Thereafter, when we wished to spy on the brooding chickadee, all we had to do was to lay back the hinged stub and peer in upon her. She was surprised to see us the first time we did so, and plainly frightened out of her small wits. But she kept her place, as stubborn and faithful as a setting hen, never taking her bright eyes off us. We made it a point to visit the nest almost daily thereafter, and so enjoyed the nestlings all through the naked, the downy, and the feathered stages. They never liked us, however, and never failed to hiss like young steam-cocks and fluff their bodies out at us until the day they abandoned the nest, to go rambling about the trees in true chickadee fashion.

XIX

THE KINGS OF APPLETREEVILLE

Our new neighbors had built their home and were housekeeping before we knew they had even selected their site, which was an exposed branch of a Duchess apple tree standing close beside the walk. It was the man of the family we discovered first, and Sister Freddy who first noticed him.

"Have you seen that kingbird out there in the back-yard, perched on the tip-top branch of that dead plum tree?" she asked one day. "I've noticed him for two days now, and wonder why he is there?"

This directed our attention to the newcomers, and soon our whole family was much interested in the king-birds. Any time of the day we could look out of our back door and see Mrs. King's dark body in the apple tree, snugly fitted over the large, dish-shaped nest like a black cover with two handles, and Mr. King on the plum tree just across the walk, immaculate in his black evening suit and silver-satin vest and fashionable pompadour, or rather immaculate except for his coat-tails dipped in flour. Hour after hour he would perch there, like a big black leaf growing all alone out of the top of that topmost branch. Sometimes he would call a sharp "Chink! chink!" like the squeak of a rusty

gate-hinge, to Mrs. King, who answered him or not, just as she liked. Usually, however, each bird sat quiet as though patiently waiting for time to pass.

Mr. King was always wide awake, though, and kept a watchful eye all about, even if he did occasionally stretch a wing or a leg, preen his feathers, and yawn. Often he would raise his wings, slide off into the air, make a flutter and a stop in mid-flight, and then go over to Mrs. King and poke into her mouth the fly he had snapped. And twice we saw him take her place on the nest while she went away for a short rest, standing over it with masculine awkwardness, instead of snuggling down on it neatly. This pseudo-hovering he did on two different occasions when it was raining; on sunny days he left the sun to keep the eggs warm while his mate was off.

At first he would chink threateningly at Flossie and Dossie, the two kittens, as they came to take their sun-bath under their favorite rose-bush near by; but after a few days he stopped calling to them, although he always kept on the alert while they were about. And if a flock of sparrows ever gathered in his plum tree or in the apple tree, he would scold them roundly as long as they remained, though we never saw him offer to do his unwelcome callers violence.

One day, when Mother was looking at the nest through the opera-glasses, she commenced to laugh.

"See that dangling bit of cord, with a tack on the end? About two weeks ago I brought a big handful of cord out to use for sweet pea supports. I laid it down for a moment, to go into the house, and when I came back it was

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

KINGBIRD

gone. There is my lost cord. I remember that tack on a string. That nest is almost entirely made of string."

And such proved to be the case when, the nesting over, we climbed up to have a look at the cradle. There was very little in it aside from string. They seemed to have carried the bunch of cord up there and burrowed a nest into it, adding a few sticks and grass-blades to form the skeleton.

After about two weeks of patient waiting Sister Freddy heard excited bird voices in the backyard one morning early. Looking out she found both birds standing on the edge of the nest, gazing down into it and chirping an animated dialogue.

"One of the princes has arrived," she announced. "Listen."

There was a long, shrill peeping from the nest, not one bit like the parental sharp *chink,* but much like a real baby's faint, hungry wail. And above the edge of the cradle appeared a wide-opened, red-lined beak, waving wildly. At that the father spread his wings and hurried off for food, while the mother remained at the nest, talking softly to the fretful baby. When the father returned with a grasshopper, he popped it into his son's great mouth. The little one dropped its head, and the mother settled down on the nest while the father flew to his perch on the plum tree. He looked all about, said a hoarse farewell, and slid off into the air toward the garden. Before long we noticed that Father King had a habit of stopping first on his perch, both going to the nest and coming from it, while the mother always flew straight to and from the cradle.

All day the parents chattered and worked. Almost any time we looked out, we could see a wide-opened beak above the brim of the nest, and hear the princeling's call for "Bugs! Worms! Anything good to eat!"

Then, late in the afternoon, we discovered the two parents again hovering above the nest, one on each side, chinking excitedly, and looking into two more red, hungry mouths. Soon the father was off foraging, and the next day there was not a moment for him to enjoy his favorite plum tree tip, for there were three crying nestlings to feed. The mother commenced to help before the third bantling arrived, though she spent more time about the nest than did Father King.

Busy as they were, the two parents were never both away at the same time. If Mother King went a-bugging, Father King stood guard in the top of his own tree; if he were away, Mother King perched close to the nest, or on it, covering the little ones from the hot sun, her wings spread about or over them most lovingly. Frequently they took turns foraging, but sometimes Mr. King flew off a second or even a third time for food, leaving the mother on guard. We could tell them apart, easily, by their peculiar mannerisms. Not only did they have different ways of flying to and from the nest, but when about it they appeared quite individual, although so much alike in color and size. For the father was awkward and ill-at-ease when near the young, and male-like, apparently nervous and at a loss just what to do for them, much as he wished to serve. He was much more successful as a forager than as a nurse, and ap-

peared to know it. Once or twice we caught him trying to cover the little ones from the hot sun, and it was laughable to see his gawky attempts to mother them. He half stood, half squatted above the little ones, with none of that snuggly, warm wing-spread Mother King gave her babies.

The very day the third nestling was born we witnessed a near-accident to the little family in which Father King proved himself a most capable protector on the offensive. We heard a great shrieking and chinking, and running out, saw one of the birds flying anxiously about the trunk of the tree, which a big gray cat was climbing.

"Help! help!" cried Sister Freddy, and started to the rescue with a broom. But before she got there, the cat was running for dear life toward the alley, and there was Mr. King flying round and round his head, stabbing furiously at his eyes and threatening every instant to put them out if the cat didn't make haste. When the marauder was over the fence Mr. King came back to his plum-tree twig, chinking triumphantly, and fluffing his feathers angrily. Then, when he had calmed himself somewhat, he went over to the nest, where Mrs. King was now covering the babies, and the whole affair was talked over at some length between them.

Finally Mr. King went back to his tree, where he rested a bit and preened. Then he sailed down into the grass, and gave chase to a big grasshopper. He bounded in long leaps over the ground, while just ahead his prey kept out of reach. But after several jumps he overtook the poor fellow in the air, and swooped up to the

nest with it. Three hungry mouths cried and begged for it, but before letting them have it, Father King looked them all over carefully, as if trying to remember which was fed last, or to ascertain which stomach was the emptiest. The cat-catastrophe was forgotten by this time, and only the burning question of keeping the young supplied with food was occupying his attention.

After ten days of feeding, the nestlings began to show the effects of their parents' untiring labor. For early one morning there was one of them squatting on the edge of the cradle. He was pretty well feathered, though his wings and tail were short and stumpy, and little wisps of down stuck out here and there between the feathers, giving him quite a ragged appearance. The little fellow was dozing, his head laid back till his beak touched the silky vest gleaming in the sunshine.

When Father King called from his plum-tree perch, the baby didn't answer. But when the mother flew down close to the nest with food, he was wide awake and whining for it. But two other hungry mouths wanted it, too, so with a spread of his wings, and a fluttering hop, Prince Silvervest got over on the edge of the nest nearest his mother, and crowded between her and the two nestlings. Still his wide-opened beak got no bug, so after begging a bit more, he took another fluttering hop which landed him completely out of the nest and on the branch.

Mother King kept close watch of the venturesome little prince, and Father King called out many a warning, or encouragement. Perhaps it was advice, for Prince Silvervest finally got the bug. It was plain

Mother King was not pleased at his coming out of the nest so soon, for after giving him the bug, she peered tenderly into the nest and chinked softly to the disappointed babies there. But Father King was delighted, for he was soon back with a grub which he didn't even offer to the two nestlings, but brought straight to Silvervest. As Father King settled on the branch it swayed ever so slightly, and Prince Silvervest teetered dangerously.

"Oh, he's falling!" we cried in chorus.

But the little fellow quickly spread his wings, flapped them several times, got his balance, and gobbled the tidbit. All that morning the parents were particularly attentive to Prince Silvervest, the mother apprehensively and the father dotingly. When the mother was on guard at the nest, she rested as closely to him as she could get, and even spread a wing about him as though wanting to hover and protect him. The father would call from the plum tree, as long as the little fellow would cry back, and redoubled the feeding whenever he dozed.

Along in the afternoon the wind was blowing strong, and Prince Silvervest was often seen flapping his stubby wings for balance. As we studied his clumsy teeterings on that branch, comparing them with his father's easy swaying on the twig, we decided the fledgling had only begun to command the use of his pinions.

When bedtime came Prince Silvervest was about two feet from the nest, and we were all wondering where he would spend the night. It was a revelation of bird-parent wisdom to watch the maneuvers which got him back into the cradle. Prince Silvervest had received

the most of the breakfast that morning, due to his mother's anxious ministerings and his father's fond pride, but now the two nestlings got nearly all the supper, and when Prince Silvervest was allowed a bit, he had to take a step or two toward the nest in order to reach the morsel. In this way he was finally tolled back home and into bed.

The next morning we found Prince Silvervest already sunning himself on the home branch, and a second nestling balanced on the edge of the nest. It perched there some time, as though taking a good look at the big world, then it stretched each wing and leg in turn to get out the kinks, flapped once or twice, yawned, and settled down for a nap. We promptly named this one the Princess, because less venturesome than Prince Silvervest. An hour or two later she tumbled back into the crib with the third baby, to enjoy its security for a time; when next she appeared she climbed to the edge of the nest, rested, thought it over, finally fluttered clear of her crib and got out on the branch, edging slowly along toward the substantial-looking tree-trunk.

But Prince Silvervest hitched out near the end of the home branch, and after spending half the morning there, suddenly fluttered his wings, teetered, balanced, and half-flew, half-fell down upon a branch about a foot below. This short flight seemed to encourage him, for after a while he tried it again, and settled down on a branch still lower. Father and Mother King didn't seem to want their reckless son on that branch, and kept calling and flying back and forth until he had been coaxed to take several little hopping flights which

brought him up to a branch above the nest. And there he was at bedtime.

As for the third nestling, the Princeling, he stayed quietly at home all day, seeming to care only for eating and sleeping. And, indeed, the other two kept their good appetites, no matter how much they were fed. The babies all had shining, clean little vests, and were as round as pats of butter, but the parents began to show the wear of parenthood and were thin and work-worn.

When night came the father and mother had coaxed Prince Silvervest upon the same branch with the Princess, and there the two birdlings cuddled close up to the trunk for the night. Mother King settled down into the nest with Princeling, and Father King slept beside the two older children. Or so they were all resting when we saw them last.

It stormed in the night and we wondered how the Kings were enduring the wind and rain. Sister Freddy was out early, to find Princeling on the edge of the nest, Princess still on her old branch, and Silvervest in the top of the tree, basking in the warm sunshine as though there had been no terrifying storm in the night. But later, Prince Silvervest spread his wings, and fluttered awkwardly, but with a real sail, down into the top of the kittens' rose-bush!

"Chink! chink! chink!" called Father King in great excitement, dashing from his lookout to a branch just over the rose-bush. "Chink! chink!" and he flew down beside Prince Silvervest and back to the branch over his head.

"He mustn't stay there!" we decided, and Sister Freddy offered to put him back in the tree.

She slowly approached the rose-bush, but she had no sooner put her hand on the birdling than a veritable storm broke all about her. The Prince squealed loudly, and flew out from under her hand to a lower part of the bush. Immediately the air above her was full of angry chinks and excited bird-cries, as Father King flew threateningly about just above her head. Freddy threw her arms over her head to protect her eyes, but almost at once Father King was gone, though his angry cries could be heard farther away. When we located him again, he was swinging back and forth on the top branch of an apple tree fully a rod away, and beside him was Prince Silvervest, still squealing with alarm.

"Well, the little fraud!" laughed Sister Freddy. "If he can fly that well, he ought to be pretty safe."

Father King and Prince Silvervest finally quieted down, though from the chatter which went on when Mother King returned, she was told all about the narrow escape her eldest child had had. At least, she left the nest as soon as she had poked her offering down a yawning throat, and joined her mate and her foolhardy son in their tree, where much twittering went on for a few moments.

Then Father King seemed filled with the determination to get Prince Silvervest out of the tree where he had sought refuge. He flew to his own perch in the plum tree, and kept calling. But his son refused to stir, and after replying to his commands for some time, even settled down with his beak on his breast and refused to say a

word more. Then Father King flew back to Prince Silvervest, and scolded him roundly. Prince Silvervest whined, and opened his mouth for food, which made his father scold all the more.

Soon Mother King came with a tidbit to comfort the frightened child, but Father King spoke a few sharp *chinks,* and she flew over to his plum tree with the food, the first time we had ever seen her enter that tree. And this time she did not go to his special twig; she never once went there that we noticed, thereby perhaps demonstrating her tactful wisdom. Father King followed her, and took his favorite perch, calling. Still Prince Silvervest would not come, and only squatted tight, and squealed. So Mother King took the insect to the Princeling, who, during this excitement, had left the nest for the first time and was on the home branch near it.

Father King went away, and when he returned first settled down beside Prince Silvervest, but firmly refused to give him the bug, in spite of his coaxing and reaching. Instead he took it to the Princess, then went back to his tree and chinked commandingly. And this time Prince Silvervest obeyed. He spread his wings, squeaked with alarm, but came flapping awkwardly over and alighted several branches below his father's perch.

We cheered him roundly, and so did Father King, who flew down beside him and chinked softly to him. And he rewarded his son most substantially as well, by going off for a bug, which he poked into Silvervest's mouth as soon as it opened for it. A very good way to get him to obey, we agreed.

All that morning Prince Silvervest stayed quietly in

his father's favorite tree. He seemed to have had enough for one day, and was willing to remain where his father bade. After lunch, we observed that the Princess was far out on a limb of the home tree, and that the Princeling had moved farther away from the nest and seemed ambitious to catch up with his sister.

"Chink, chink!" called Father King several times, and soon the gentle, obedient Princess gave a flutter and a flap, and there she was, on the branch below Prince Silvervest.

We were now curious to know what the Princeling would do and hovered about. By always feeding him on the side toward the plum tree, and by making him hop toward his food, the parents finally got him on the tip of the home branch. And at last, in response to his father's encouraging voice, he made his first flight, and dropped on a twig just below the Princess. When Mother King flew in with a bug, she first went to the home branch, and not finding her child there, stood craning her neck this way and that trying to locate him. Father King called a merry "Here, here!" and she joined the family in the plum tree. When she had fed the Princeling, she posed beside him, and the five resembled a family group ready for a photograph.

Their domestic affairs were interesting and often amusing. Once Father King went foraging, while Mother King fed Prince Silvervest and mothered the three in turn. When the father came back, he was just handing over the nice fat bug to Prince Silvervest, when Mother King stopped him.

"Chink, chink, chink!" she commanded.

Father King took a step or two away from Prince Silvervest, the bug still in his beak.

"Me-e-e-e-e!" teased the disappointed child.

"Chink, chink, chink!" repeated Mother King firmly.

And if Father King didn't hop down to the Princess and give her the bug! It was her turn, and Mother King wasn't going to let the doting father give all his treats to the eldest son, of whom he was so proud.

That evening we sat on the back porch a long time enjoying the birds. The rain of the night before and the warm sun all day had brought out millions of gnats and mosquitoes. The air was full of them, and not only our kingbirds, but others as well, found easy hunting. In whatever direction we looked we could see birds darting, from trees, roofs, telephone poles, wires, fence-posts. Each one would flutter a moment in the air, flycatcher-wise, and return to its perch, either to eat its catch or to get its bearings for making another sally. Sometimes a bird would make two catches in one flight as we could tell by its loop-the-loop maneuvers, but not often. Mr. and Mrs. King found supper easily prepared that evening, and did all their foraging about the trees.

As we watched we noticed that the parents were both trying to get the little ones out of the bare plum tree and into a near-by Whitney apple tree, thickly leaved. Each parent, when not diving into the air for food, would perch in this tree and call. Soon Prince Silvervest bravely made the trip across, then the Princess, and lastly the baby. The leaves were so thick that the fledglings were well hidden, but we finally made them out, high up and close to the trunk. The three little white

breasts were as close together as they could press, the heads of the two outside pointing one way, and the middle one facing in the opposite direction. Of course, we promptly declared that the one in the middle was the Princeling, being well snuggled by the older children.

The next day the family moved about considerably, changing trees three times. We noticed, too, that two of the little ones had learned to chink, and that Prince Silvervest was now able to fly from his own branch to meet his parents when they settled down on another one with food, though he did not yet have sufficient command of his wings to go foraging for himself. As for the baby, he dozed and teetered on a single branch most of the day, and only woke up for food, or to change trees when commanded to do so. Along in the afternoon they were all herded one by one into an ash in the side yard, Prince Silvervest leading the way as usual and the baby bringing up the rear.

As the family was now headed south in relation to the home tree, we wondered if that was why Father King had refused to let Prince Silvervest remain in the tree where his first long flight took him, the day he was so spry in getting out of the rose-bush. The family never did go into that tree, that we knew, or at least not while we could distinguish the individuals as members of the family. Orientation may have had something to do with their avoidance of that tree, toward the northern end of the yard, but more likely it was merely prejudice, or accident; one of us suggested it might be that they wished to go out at the front gate, and so bring us good luck.

All the next day it rained, and we saw nothing of the King family, though we searched for them. But the following morning it was bright and warm once more, and we had not been stirring long before we heard Father King's familiar chink. He was not on his plum-tree perch, however, but on the peak of the northern gable of the house, and tit-tat-toe, lined up in a row along the sloping edge, were the three little ones! Their shining satin waistcoats were turned full toward the sun, and all were chinking a greeting, or a morning song, which sounded much like a rollicking round. Later in the day we missed them, and, after several days, we decided they had moved on and forgotten us.

But about a week later we heard a familiar kingbird call. There was Father King on his old plum-tree perch, sunning himself, swaying gracefully with the bending twig, and chinking lazily to himself, as if making up for all those busy hours he had spent foraging thereabouts. Finally he spread his wings and slid off into the air, and we never saw him again to know him.

Later, whenever in the parks and along the streets, we saw small flocks of satin-breasted kingbirds, young and old, on trees and telephone wires, sunning or foraging, we took a personal pleasure in them, as if greeting old friends. Studying one kingbird family so faithfully, day after day, has given us an especial interest in all individuals bearing the name, and a great respect for the dignity and worth of the species as a whole.

XX

A WINTER WELCOME

My friends have a country home, "The Aviary," situated some miles from town on an unused by-road in the woods. Their chief enjoyment there is the birds; they always have some feathered friend feeding from the hand or resting sociably on a shoulder, as familiarly as though hands and shoulders were made merely for bird perches. Unlike most summer cottages, "The Aviary" is not locked up at the end of the season, and never entered until the next one is well begun; the owners often visit it in the dead of winter just to see how their bird friends are faring.

One winter day they invited me to accompany them on one of these trips. They had not been out for a month, having spent that time traveling. Before leaving they had put lumps of suet in the trees, and several pounds of cracked nuts and grain in the feeders they have tacked up about the place.

Our welcome was a hearty one, and began when we were yet a long way off. We had just turned from the main road into the half-mile stretch leading to "The Aviary" and a lake beyond, when a snow bunting fluttered up from the slush a few feet ahead of the car. No one had noticed it until it moved, so well did its

brown and white colorings blend with the snow and slush. It flew on ahead, flaunting the white wing feathers of which it appears so proud, since in flight it veers constantly from one side to the other as if to show them off. It kept twittering softly and mischievously to itself as it flew, until it had gained on us a rod or so, when it dropped to the ground between the tracks. Its colors camouflaged it so well when on the snowy slush that it might well have been trying to play hide-and-seek with us, for at any distance whatever it was difficult to distinguish bird from earth. As the auto went over it, it arose instantly, and like a sprite reappeared almost at once and danced gaily on ahead, swerving first to the right and then to the left, as if glancing over its shoulders to see if we were keeping up.

Over and over it played this game of "follow my leader" with us, always keeping in the road and always when overtaken flitting on ahead to set us a new mark. It became quite a merry game with us to see which one would be the first to "I spy" the bird when it flew out from under the car. Usually it flew up almost immediately, and out from between the front wheels, but once it waited so long that the auto, although moving slowly, passed over it, and the bird had to fly past the car to get ahead.

Just before we reached "The Aviary" the snow bunting flew out from under the car, and instead of alighting ahead, went off into the woods with a final flirt of its frolicsome tail, and a faint warble as much as to say: "Now you can find the way without me, I am sure."

"And now," laughed one of my friends, "we have two worries to satisfy. Have the birds overeaten, and will they remember us?"

Both questions were answered while we were still outside the gate. For there was a soft chorus of twitters and wing-beats among the snowy firs and poplars surrounding the cottage, and when my friend held a handful of cracked corn out it was not long before a white-breasted nuthatch flew down to feed just as it, or some twin brother, had fed four weeks ago. My attention was called to the bird's manner of always alighting in an up-and-down position on the tips of the feeder's fingers, then leisurely walking into the hand. When the bird had taken the edge off his hunger he commenced to carry off kernels to deposit in the bark of various trees, never failing to chirp a grateful "Thanks, thanks," while darting back for more. He went back and forth on the run, as if fearing this windfall might not last until he could get all his cellars filled.

For, although the feeding boxes are large enough and numerous enough to hold pounds of food, the nuthatches seemed to remember that these public stores have a way of dwindling rapidly, and to be of the opinion that it is wise to deposit a goodly supply in private larders. Nuthatches are not good communists,—they like their own personal hoards of the good things of life.

The chickadees, too, fed from the hand, and then betrayed their black caps were true thinking caps by flying off with bits of food to bury. However, their forethought in getting a plenty was justified and robbed of any hint of greediness, by a little discovery I made that

day. I caught sight of a brown creeper in a poplar, and watched him hitch up the trunk, searching every furrow of bark within the swing of his beak. Now in this very tree was an odd knot where I had watched a chickadee deposit a bit of cracked grain not long before; consequently I was amused when the brown creeper reached the place to see him nose out this hidden morsel and calmly appropriate it with an air of "Finding's having."

There were many more birds in the trees about "The Aviary" than we had seen anywhere else along our drive, all frankly at home and with but few exceptions flocking amicably together. Several goldfinches were feeding on weed seeds, their summer radiance hidden under practical winter overcoats of dull brown and gray, until they looked much like the tree sparrows they were hobnobbing with. But there was a difference in their manner of feeding; the goldfinches would hang on the weeds like big balls of down, while eating; whereas the tree sparrows preferred standing in the snow beneath and eating what the goldfinches shook down to them. The goldfinches soon tired of a stalk and would gallop off with a "Come follow me" twitter which was but a pale echo of their summer song; but as long as there was a seed left on the snowy table-cloth the thrifty tree sparrows would remain at table. The tiny mites seemed very comfortable there, too, washing down their dry food with sips of snow, and drawing first one cold foot and then the other up into the warm muffs they wore slung about their necks.

A flicker or two was to be seen prowling about the bare trees, selecting the trunks and carefully keeping off any of the snow-laden branches, although the tiny golden-crowned kinglets would sit almost buried in a great bed of snow on the tip of a fir branch, and lisp their happiness in the general chorus. The blue jays made a picture one wouldn't miss,—effectively posed on the green firs or leafless gray poplars with the smoke-colored winter sky for a background, and their creaking notes to match the setting, like echoes of the crossed branches squeaking in the cold wind, both creak and squeak smoothed and softened into music by the muffling snow.

The crested titmouse, almost as bold as the blue jay, mischievously but musically announced his name by calling over and over his cheery whistle of "Peter, peter!" A winter wren, like his cousin, kept close to the cottage, and went chasing in and out the vines about the porch, hinting it was not one bit cold for him by carrying his tail spread fanwise across his back, and bobbing his fat little body from side to side as he tilted on a spray and fanned himself to cool off from the exercise of looking after spiders. In fact, this independent mite seemed quite capable of getting along without human aid, for he would warn us to "Quit, quit, quit," and dart off among the vines in search of his favorite spider food, trilling a short snatch of summery warbles.

Then there were both hairy and downy woodpeckers, too busy about their own affairs to fraternize with their brother birds or human friends. Pine-grosbeaks muffled to their thick, hawklike bills in bright crimson

flocked with their demure gray mates, and redpolls with big hoods almost hiding what small beaks they possessed, in their red and dusky-ash and smoke-gray and rose, were so many half-burned coals saved over from some autumn bonfire to make the wintry scene warm and cozy.

When my friend went into the cottage to see if all was well within she called us to "Come see this owl!" It was a tiny little fellow asleep on the inglenook settle, but when one of us went near to pick it up, the droll creature opened one eye, slipped out from under his hand, and disappeared up the chimney with a taunting "Saw-it, saw-it," which identified him at once as the Acadian, or saw-whet owl.

We started home down the lane just at sunset, with the sun like a big orange ball racing with us behind a lattice of delicate poplar branches and feathery pine tops. And just where the by-road curved into the highway, we were surprised and pleased to find our snow bunting friend still loitering about, feeding where we had first fallen in with it. Or, if it was not he, we felt safe in calling it the same bird. But although it sprang up from the slush as we came on it did not guide us long, but after flitting out from under the car two or three times, it flew back behind us to the corner, leaving us to get home as best we could, but twittering us a merry farewell as it went.

XXI

A GOOD FIGHTER

"ONE of the queerest fights I ever saw," observed my friend the lumber cruiser, "was between a bulldog and a screech owl."

"It seems to me that would be no fight at all," I challenged, both to bring out the story and to express my candid opinion.

"I suppose," he remarked dryly, "you'd say the odds were all in favor of the bulldog?"

"Most certainly."

"Well, here are the facts. The cook in our lumber camp had a pet bulldog that was a fiend at fighting. Bill had all the other dogs around the camp, and the men, too, so cowed they didn't dare go near that shanty without cook's permission. He'd chew the pants, and the legs, too, right off a man he didn't care to see hanging around, and the few dogs he could get a sight of always left his vicinity howling with fear.

"One day a lumberjack brought a screech owl into camp—he'd found it asleep in a hollow tree. The cook saw it, and immediately adopted it, naming the wise-looking fellow Diogenes.

"But Bill, jealous as only a dog can be, no sooner spied the little rusty-brown bunch of feathers dozing quietly in a corner of the room than he went after it, head on.

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

SCREECH OWL

"Diogenes heard him coming, for all he seemed fast asleep. He opened his eyes wide, fluffed his feathers straight out all over his body until he looked several times his natural size, spread his wings up and back until the tips touched above and behind his head, gave a hiss like a jet of steam blowing off, and jumped straight toward Bill. He landed on Bill's nose with both feet, with a death grip of his claws that reached clear to the bone.

"Immediately Bill's growls turned to howls, for all the world like the shrieks of a human being in desperate agony. He dodged here and there. He ran like mad all around the room, leaving a trail of blood behind him. He lay down and rolled over. He clawed and he snapped. And all the time he was yelping as loud as he could yelp. But Diogenes held on to his perch with both feet, hissing like a steam engine, or snapping his beak like a string of firecrackers. He was thoroughly undaunted. And really, there was nothing Bill could do to get him off. The owl's position on top of his nose made the bird safe from all danger, and whenever he tried to claw Diogenes off he only hurt himself the more. A bulldog can't fight if he can't use his teeth, and Diogenes seemed to know that the dog couldn't do anything to hurt him.

"Bill soon saw that he was helpless, and gave up trying to hurt Diogenes, or even to get rid of him. He just dropped down in the middle of the floor and howled at the top of his voice for help. Still Diogenes held on, hissing and snapping, with every feather on his compact little body standing out at right angles, the picture of

anger and defiance. He showed no disposition to leave his bleeding, howling victim in peace, even though Bill had surrendered completely; to all appearance Diogenes didn't intend ever to let go.

"Well, we men had to go to the rescue of that bulldog. We couldn't strike Diogenes off any more than the dog could shake him off, for his claws were buried in the fleshy part of Bill's nose. You know a bulldog has quite a thick cushion on his muzzle, and this made a good foothold for Diogenes. We didn't want to kill the plucky little bird, and then, too, we were afraid if we did the claws would stiffen and would have to be cut or dug out. Finally, we threw an apron over the owl's head, and by pulling him on his neck, and boxing him, while holding his feet still so as not to hurt Bill, we succeeded in making him let go. That was funny, too. We didn't know he had loosened his grip until Bill, who had been lying there thoroughly cowed and howling at the top of his lungs, told us. For he no sooner felt himself free than he shot like a bullet for the window, leaving the owl in our hands to do as we wished with him. Bill bolted through glass and all in his anxiety to escape, and took refuge in the farthest corner of the last stable in the place. And never, even after the cook let Diogenes go back to the woods, could Bill be made to go near that shanty. And, strange to say, from that day on he was a thoroughly peaceable citizen; for if he ever did threaten to disturb a man, all one had to do was to give a loud hiss, or a snap-snap-snap of his teeth, and Bill was gone like a streak."

XXII

A WILD GOOSE BANQUET

We are all accustomed to seeing in the spring and fall flocks of white brant geese flying under orders, following wherever their bold captain leads. But probably few people are aware that these birds feed at command. An enthusiastic bird-student who lives on the Texas gulf-coast tells me of his witnessing a very striking example of the order maintained by these birds.

Early one spring, just before the northward flight, one of the colored tenants on his farm reported that great numbers of wild geese,—"millyuns," he declared,—were feeding regularly every morning on a great sandy stretch of coast a few miles from the plantation.

So the planter started out to see it for himself. By daylight he was safely hidden behind some logs and reeds, with an umbrella covered with reeds over his head to aid his concealment, and armed with a strong pair of field-glasses.

Soon a flock of thirty or forty birds came flying into sight in the usual V-shaped formation. Directly overhead they began to circle around, coming nearer and nearer the ground with every revolution. Presently they alighted, and stood quietly "at attention," only occasionally uttering a chatty "houk" as though clear-

ing their throats in preparation for after-dinner speeches.

He watched carefully, but not a head was ducked to eat. Other flocks flew in, circled about, and alighted, and others, and still others. At times the sky was clouded with circling squads, and the air hummed musically with the beat of many wings. Soon the gravel beach was hidden by the rows and rows of great white birds.

Not wishing to exaggerate, the watcher places the number at a thousand, though he is convinced his estimate is much too small, in fact, he seems inclined to think Uncle Sambo didn't stretch it much in his figure of "millyuns."

He watched closely all the while, but could not see that any of the birds commenced eating after alighting. Instead every head was up in the air, high, and they stood gravely waiting, with an occasional outburst of goose-talk, like polite guests assembling in a banquet room.

Then suddenly he noticed that each bird was feeding and "graveling," though he had not heard a sound, or seen a sign that was anything like orders to fall to. Each head went down almost simultaneously, and the noise of eating commenced. That was all there was to it. If there was a host who bade them begin, the watcher failed to catch the signal.

No other flock flew in after the eating began. All were there before the banquet commenced, and early arrivals had politely waited for the last ones to come.

The birds moved about but little, although at times

there would seem to be a general shifting like a slow drift of white foam over the sands, or a bird would make a short flight over the crowd and immediately settle in another spot.

All kept up a low gabble, not more disorderly than that usually heard at banquets. The click of their beaks, however, was as though each guest had taken to sharpening his knife on his fork, and it made a peculiar snapping noise like a brisk wood-fire.

After about an hour of feeding, or taking sand, or both, the flocks began to mount into the air and fly off, one after another. In a short time all were gone, and when the planter walked over the sand afterward the only trace of the breakfast was the hundreds of webbed tracks that printed the sands, interspersed with an occasional groove which some sharp bill had made in its search for a bit of plant or in tracking down a toothsome slug or mollusk.

XXIII

A DRUM SOLO

The ruffed grouse is the kettle-drummer of nature's orchestra, and also the drum itself. Like his human counterpart he occupies a very secluded spot behind all the other musicians while drumming, and so secret is he about it that though many woodmen have heard his long roll, very few of them have ever seen the drummer in action. Most of the favored ones who did get a glimpse of the bird while drumming have not been able to ascertain just how it was done, but supposed that because he stood on a log or stump, he beat on that with his wings, unless the thunderous roll was caused by the wings striking against the bird's body.

A lumber-cruiser who has spent the most of his life in the northern woods assures me that he has several times closely watched this drumming, and he is convinced that the bird drum is nothing but hollow air. The bird gets on the log for two reasons, he says,—to be seen by the hen birds, and to keep his wings clear of the ground. This is his description of one of these courting performances which he was fortunate enough to witness from start to finish:

He was sitting under a tall pine eating lunch one warm spring day when a ruffed grouse came out of the brush opposite him, and hopped up on a fallen pine. Evidently the bird did not see him, for his dull clothing

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

RUFFED GROUSE

harmonized well with the background, and there was a thin veil of low shrubs between them, the upper branches making a good screen through which he could see without being seen.

The bird slowly strutted up and down the full length of the pine, back and forth, several times, with that proud swagger his barnyard relative affects. Soon he stopped at about the center of the log, face to face with his unseen watcher, and looked all about him. Next he raised his wings and spread them wide, his neck slightly bent and his black ruff standing out in a frill, much like a rooster getting ready to crow. Down came the wings, from a vertical to a horizontal position, and a loud, sharp "rump," much like a single drum stroke, crashed out in the still air. Again the wings came up high above the bird's back, and descended with another "rump." The wing-stroke was repeated a third time, followed by a short pause. Again came the three sharp, short, distinct beats, as if commanding attention for the real performance, which began almost immediately thereafter. The strokes began to increase both in time and strength until presently they lost individuality and became blended in a continuous roll of almost deafening thunder. The wings were then moving so rapidly that they were but a blur, yet there was always a streak of light between them and the bird's body to prove that the wings did not strike the breast to produce the drumming, but struck only the air.

This long roll lasted a full minute, then slowed down quickly until the individual beats could be distinguished once more. Suddenly they stopped altogether, and the

bird dropped down on the log as though dead. He squatted there for a short time, completely tired out, his head lolled over to one side and his wings drooping out over the log.

Soon, however, the grouse's head began to come up, he got on his feet, looked about, strutted up and down the log a few times, and paused as before. When he stopped he gave the same preliminary strokes, and the thunder roll commenced:

"Rump! Rump! Rump! Rump—rump—rump—rump-rump-rump-rump-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-r-rump-rump-rump-rump—rump—rump—rump—rump—rump! Rump! Rump!"

Again the bird dropped down on the log as though he would never move again! But he did, for he repeated the performance four times more, while out from the thickets of underbrush ran several demure little gray hens. Beyond a doubt they came to pay homage to the gallant drummer, although they were most coy about showing too much interest and fed quietly about the log while the performance went on. At the close of the concert the drummer fluttered down to the ground and went off with his flock, disappearing through thicket and underbrush.

After the grouse flock was gone the woodsman carefully examined the log. The bark had plainly not been touched, for it was whole and unchipped. And there was but a single gray feather to be found on the ground, though from the force of the blows and their duration he would not have been surprised to find the ground entirely covered with grouse plumage.

XXIV

JIMMY AND JENNY

"THE artists who draw those cozy little pictures of a brooding mother bird with the male perched but a yard away in full song, do not copy from nature," says John Burroughs. "The thrasher's nest I found was thirty or forty rods from the point where the male was wont to indulge in his brilliant recitative."

This is doubtless true of birds which do not build near to man, or in the protective houses provided by boys who have reached a certain stage in manual training work.

But Jenny Wren had no sooner commenced brooding in the bird-house my brother had put on the low barn gable, anticipating her arrival, than Jimmy, feeling secure in the knowledge that his mate was safely barricaded in such snug quarters, fell heart and soul into his duty of keeping her well cheered. He would sing to her by the hour, perching either on the gable peak directly above, on the high lattice just beneath, or even on the little porch of the bird-house itself.

And this he did regardless of humans in the same yard who might like to slumber later than he. He always awoke early, being such a daylight saver that he didn't waste a minute of dawn. He would be tuning up before sunrise, and although we are early risers at home during the summer, he would be in full song long before we were

ready to stir. Indeed, Jimmy served as a reliable alarm-clock all the while the brooding was in progress, and being of the self-winding type, he always kept running on in ear-splitting tones which compelled attention.

"Well, blame wrens!" ejaculated one sister on a Sunday morning when Jimmy had been shrieking at the top of his lungs for hours. And exasperated beyond measure, she sat straight up in bed, drew the covers close around her ears, and dropped back on her pillow, hoping to be able to drown out that tight-wire voice and get in her extra nap.

But it was no use. No one could sleep with Jimmy war-whooping at the top of his voice, and although she had welcomed the arrival of the wrens with great enthusiasm, anticipating the pleasure she was to have studying their housekeeping activities, she was disgruntled at being unable to enjoy her usual nap, and did not have a good word for Jimmy all day.

Not that he cared one whit. He sang his doxology right along the greater part of the day, with undiminished fervor, his tiny head lifted more reverently to the sky, if possible, in honor of the day.

Later, however, she forgave Jimmy his vocalizing as a mate, when she observed what an ideal little father he could be. For after the wrenlings came he had but little time for song, and when he did have a spare moment he did not perch near the nest and war-whoop at them, but took up his station on the opposite end of the barn, and sang a lullaby most soft and gurgly and musical.

It may have been, as Mr. Burroughs suggests, that he

went farther away in order to avoid betraying the presence of his young. But we preferred to believe that he retreated there just to escape their constant wailing for food, and to soothe his harassed soul with song.

Just before the young left the nest he changed his tactics, and instead of lullabies, or soliloquies on the joys of parenthood, he went back to his war-whooping, always from the roof of our house, or a tree between his house and ours. The louder the children cried for food, the louder he sang, with the air of saying to them:

"I know this is hard on you, but I am doing it for your own good, for it is time you were getting out and looking for your own bugs and worms. And I've earned the right to sing. Just count the bugs I've fed you on, children, and then observe what a beautiful voice I have developed from just such food."

But when he learned this wouldn't hurry them out he would join the faithful Jenny in foraging for the hungry youngsters.

Wrens are such funny birds. They are a constant joy to those who study them, not only for their generally comical appearance, but because they have so many oddly human traits. One of them is their marked "uppishness" in more ways than one. They have a streak of vulgarity in them which makes them all, male and female alike, pettish and quarrelsome. They can take offense on the least provocation, or even without any cause whatsoever.

For instance, Jenny never could abide having any of us linger about near the nest, and whenever Mother sat in her favorite place under a cherry tree near the lattice,

preparing fruit or vegetables, Jenny would sputter at her continually as she flew back and forth with food for her own family.

Both Jimmy and Jenny had a well-founded horror of cats, although Jenny carried her grudge like a chip on her shoulder, and sometimes went out of her way to harass some inoffensive tabby. To her they were all potential enemies, and she just couldn't endure them, or the sight of them. She even seemed to be able to feel them in the air, as it is said some humans suffer "felineophobia." She had a sixth sense which warned her of the presence of a cat, even afar, and she never failed to respond to the suggestion.

One of my sisters became their official cat-chaser, and as soon as she heard their peculiar cry which said as plainly as words: "Cat, cat, cat!" she would be out with the broom ready to help. A dozen times a day she would fly to their aid. Once she heard the cat-alarm at five o'clock in the morning, and flew to the rescue in kimono and moccasins. She was rather disgusted with Jenny to find her in a lilac bush in the front yard, topknot and tail sticking straight up, scolding loudly at a cat on the sidewalk, when the wren-house was on the back of the lot behind our house. Her sixth sense had warned "Cat! ahoy!" and she had promptly sent out her "S. O. S." call for help. As William Blake has quaintly observed,

> "He who shall hurt the little wren
> Shall never be beloved by men."

And Jenny saw to it her enemies were well advertised.

Jenny's hatred of cats knew no bounds, and as long as one was in sight she would scream at it like the little termagant we suspected her of being. Often when my sister would go to her help, Jenny would fly joyously out to meet her, shrieking her alarm, and would follow my sister back to the cat, hover in the air overhead, or perch near by, adding her "Scats!" to my sister's cries and flourishing broom. And as soon as sister had the animal on the run, Jenny would follow after, scolding vociferously until the prowler was glad to creep out of sight in some distant shelter. Jenny would follow a cat for blocks, if it remained in the open that long, and come back panting but satisfied. She just wouldn't have a cat in the neighborhood, if she could help it, and was always in a perfect stew until she could get it far away.

Jimmy, male-like, was less apprehensive, and didn't make so much fuss unless the cat was near the bird-house, and gave signs of having designs on it. And he was a cheery little optimist, too, for as soon as the cat had been driven from the immediate neighborhood of the nest, even though Jenny and my sister were not through chasing it, he would mount on the barn, or bird-house, or the roof of our house, and sing a triumphant round to the prowess of those brave females, or his own fearlessness.

He was so certain always that the last cat had been driven away, never to return. He was sure that henceforth peace would reign. But Jenny knew better, and always kept on the watch for the next marauder.

And her apprehension was not without foundation. For there was a high lattice which ran past the barn,

just beneath the wren-house, and one cat of the neighborhood never failed to grasp the opportunity to climb the lattice and sit there beneath the nest, patiently waiting for a wrenling, or a parent wren, to tumble into his mouth, or come within reach of his claws. That his intentions were evil could not be doubted, since his favorite sentinel post was less than a foot below the bird-house.

His presence on that post made the little parents frantic. They would get in a tree as near the cat as they could safely be, and screech at it until my sister came with the broom. As soon as the cat was started from the lattice both birds would follow it and shriek "Scat!" as loudly as their alarm could inspire them. But although Jenny always stuck to the chase until the marauder was well out of sight, Jimmy gave over soon and returned to his interrupted task of singing to the wrenlings, or feeding them.

Some members of our family declared Jimmy fought only at need, but that Jenny did it as much for love of the excitement as for necessity.

When the wrenlings began to appear in their doorway and sit on their porch, the cat-patrol doubled its watchfulness. My sister fairly lived in the yard, broom in hand, while Jenny never failed to sweep the horizon with a keen eye both going to and leaving the nest.

After the little ones had been successfully launched into the big world, Jenny and Jimmy occasionally returned to the bird-house for a short time, he to sit on the top of it and war-whoop loudly, she to go peering and poking about, in and out the door, up and down the

lattice, and into all the near-by trees. Perhaps her small brain retained some recollection of the cats she had annihilated and she was searching for some of the remains to gloat over.

XXV

SKEEZICKS AND QUEECHY

One day when I was out in the country, a small boy gave me a screech owl he had just caught in the barn. I took it to school and presented it to my pupils as Skeezicks. The children wanted to keep him, and as one boy offered to bring a cage for him I consented. It was an old squirrel-cage, large and roomy, and with strong wire bars about two inches apart. I looked at the fat, fluffy little owl, perched on the top of a window ledge, and decided the cage would hold him easily.

He looked so wise and studious that we let him remain at liberty, and settled down to work on lessons.

Suddenly a ghostly flutter of wings went over the room, and there was Skeezicks clinging savagely to the swaying bird-cage where Dicky, the canary, lived. Dicky was chirping with fright, for Skeezicks was clacking his bill and rolling his big yellow eyes threateningly, as he hung to the side of the cage.

We all cried out and ran to Dicky's rescue. I dragged the owl off by main force, and clapped him into jail. There he spent the rest of the day dozing, and making no move to eat the scraps of dog-meat the butcher's son brought for him. At last we tried forcible feeding, cutting the meat into small bits and forcing it into his beak. He did not always swallow the meat, but would drop it and clack at us menacingly.

We left him in the cage for the night, with a dish of water and some meat scraps.

The first thing I saw when I got to the schoolroom the next morning was a few yellow feathers on the floor underneath Dicky's cage. That, and several blood-stains on the wires of the bird-cage was all I ever saw of Dicky.

I looked at Skeezicks' cage, and it was empty of everything but the water and the meat, though the door was tightly closed. As for Skeezicks, he was roosting over a window, the very picture of innocence and wisdom for all his blood-stained beak with a tiny bit of yellow down on the tip.

Well, the mischief was done, and it was all my fault, for not understanding owl-nature better. I put Dicky's cage away, deciding I couldn't keep both a canary and an owl at the same time. The next time I caught Skeezicks I felt of his body, and learned that it was an easy matter for something mainly feathers to escape from such a well-ventilated prison as a squirrel-cage.

We covered the cage with wire-screening, and kept Skeezicks incarcerated for a week. But as he pined in spite of our good feeding—through lack of mice, the janitor said—we banished the cage and let him remain at liberty.

All day long he would perch somewhere over a door or a window, or in some branch of autumn leaves, only occasionally flying from one place too sunny for him to a darker corner. Sometimes he would sit in a light window, with a glassy sort of curtain drawn over each eyeball, and lids wide open. This curtain is a special drop owls have between the outer lid and the eyeball. It is a

thick, whitish, semi-transparent substance, something like the skin between the shell and the white of an egg, and protects the eye from too bright a light, and yet allows the bird to see somewhat.

We kept Skeezicks for several weeks and he became a general favorite in spite of Dicky's murder. Even the janitor declared him a first-rate mouser, and left the basement door open at night for him to prowl about as game enticed him.

Every visitor had to be introduced to Skeezicks, and he was pointed out with pride to the occasional new pupil. He really seemed to like us, and in time stopped clacking at us when we came near, and would even perch tamely on a hand or a shoulder.

It was amusing to see him bathe every morning. The first time he did so we heard a great splashing, and there he was flapping and fluttering about in the pail of water the janitor kept on the radiator for moistening the air. Skeezicks enjoyed his bath as much as a canary does, and when he was ready he flew to a sunny window and fluffed and dried himself. After this he took a bath nearly every morning.

The butcher's boy still brought contributions of dog-meat, but Skeezicks was never ravenous for them, probably because he found good mousing at night. Occasionally he would be missing from the room in the morning, but a search party through the building would always locate him in some corner and bring him back home.

One day in February a window was lowered at the top for ventilation, and presently some one exclaimed in

horrified tones: "Oh, look at Skeezicks!" He was sitting in the open window.

"Oh, we'll lose him!" cried the children, except one bright lad who suggested that we get the broom and go out and poke Skeezicks back into the room.

Every one sat tense and watched breathlessly until there was a crunching sound of stealthy footsteps outside, and the broom loomed just behind Skeezicks, apparently fast asleep. But at the instant he was about to be pushed into the room Skeezicks turned like a flash, and whisked out-of-doors. The children raced to the windows, and soon discovered Skeezicks in a tree beside the walk.

Several boys offered to climb the tree and try to get him, and I selected one to attempt it. Benjamin started up the tree, while we stood anxiously watching him from the windows and Skeezicks kept good lookout from the top of the tree, craning his neck and raising his ear-tufts in keen attention.

Benjamin was but half-way up when Skeezicks played a good joke on him, and surprised us all mightily, by spreading his wings and sailing back into the schoolroom through the window he had left.

How this feat was cheered and applauded, and how Benjamin laughed when he got back into the schoolroom and found Skeezicks there ahead of him, on a favorite perch in a branch of autumn leaves in the corner!

Doubtless Skeezicks preferred a good warm mousing precinct to the sweets of liberty.

After this we opened the windows whenever we chose, and Skeezicks made no move to leave us. Indeed, he

often sat in an open window for a breath of air, but went no farther.

Then one day Benjamin brought a second owl, a trifle smaller than Skeezicks, which his father had found in the ice-house. At first the two owls clacked savagely at each other, and even mewed and clawed a bit. But no feathers were damaged, and Queechy soon grew to be as much at home as Skeezicks, and the two developed quite a friendly feeling. They would often be seen roosting side by side over a door or window, or in a leafy branch.

Finally one mild April evening the wanderlust seized the two birds. I had stayed later than usual at school, and when I opened the outside door to go out two shadowy forms winged their way over my head, and with a farewell "to-whoo" disappeared into the twilight. Skeezicks and Queechy had departed for points unknown, though presumably some near-by wood, in search of mates, or nesting sites.

XXVI

BUILDING UNDER DIFFICULTIES

It is strange what persistency birds have. Once they make up their minds to do a thing they spend much time and even what seems like thought to accomplish their ends.

One day in mid-May I noticed a new bird note in the yard. I soon located it as coming from the garage, and turned my opera-glasses that way. It was a pair of steel-blue and chocolate-brown barn swallows, sweeping here and there and calling to each other a soft "Witt, witt." They were plainly looking for a building site, and I became most anxious that they locate in the loft. It would make an ideal nesting site for them,—better, even, than a barn, since the rough surface of the concrete walls would be ideal for mud nest foundations. The loft was cool and airy; there were windows in each end where they could wander in and out. I could find many arguments as to why those barn swallows, whose ancestors were content with a hut in a hollow log, should take up city life and reside in a concrete garage. The larger bird seemed to be of the same opinion, for he kept volplaning in and out the windows and around the building, even though his mate would only perch on the gable and twitter fretfully.

Seeing she would not follow he stopped on the gable beside her, and they talked it over in a low, murmuring tone. Then away he shot through the window, and this time she disappeared after him. Soon both were back, twittering excitedly as they darted here and there. Under the eaves, on the gable, through the window, around the garage, back and forth the two house hunters went several times. The larger and brighter bird took the lead going through the window I noticed, while the smaller and duller one came out first. Evidently the more progressive male was having trouble in convincing his less venturesome mate that their income could afford such a splendid palace.

After much agitated flying back and forth, which was too flurried to be as sweeping and graceful as is the usual flight of swallows, they sat down on the gable to prattle it all over once more. Soon, as if by common decision, away they both flew toward the street out in front of the house.

The street had recently been oiled, and no doubt they at first took it to be the mud they stood in need of. They half sat, half stood on the ground, their long wings straight up in the air to keep them clean and out of the way, and with claws and beak they worked at the dirt, trying to mold it into lumps. But the oil in the dust was a very different matter from water, and try as they would, they couldn't work it into a ball. Soon they were twittering excitedly in their bewilderment.

"Whatever can be the matter with this mud?" they seemed to be asking each other, very much puzzled.

Soon the female gave it up. She flew to a telephone

wire, chattering irritably, as though saying: "I told you the city was no place for us to build. I want a good, old-fashioned barn and some mud that will stick." No doubt she had a word or two of criticism about the vile taste of the stuff, and compared it with the sweet, uncontaminated mud of the country road. Her mate flew up beside her, and they talked it over for some time, pro and con. Once she started to leave him, but he called her back. He couldn't bear to lose this fine chance of summering in the city in a lovely new concrete garage. She came back, and the argument proceeded as before. I was watching them with interest from the front yard, and hoping against hope they would find some way out of the difficulty.

All at once I saw the male bird leave the wire, and heard his loud shriek, much like a cry of joyful discovery. He made straight to a leaking hydrant on the corner, calling to his mate to follow. Then I witnessed an interesting sight. The intelligent bird actually made mud for himself. He dabbled his feet in the pool at the grassy base of the hydrant, then flew down into the freshly turned earth about the trees in the curbing and started to mold a mud ball. He worked with his feet and beak, seeming at times to roll the tiny pellet along in the dust with his feet, and occasionally to take it into his mouth, no doubt to add the necessary saliva cement. He went to the pool for water, and kept working until he had a ball about the size of a small clay marble. His mate had flown over to the wire directly above him, and kept advising him, or scolding him, all the time he worked. Whichever it was, he worked doggedly and in

silence. When, however, with a triumphant "See! see!" he seized the ball in his beak and flew away with it, she followed obediently along. Of course he took it to the garage window, and I clapped my hands in delight.

Soon both birds were back making mud, and after I had watched them fly away with a few pellets, I went into the garage loft to investigate.

Near one corner, where no sun would shine and no draft blow, they had started their nest. As yet it was a very shallow curve, which looked as though it were intended for a segment of a circle, made of a few mud balls laid closely one beside the other and tamped together until the edge of one ball mingled with that of its neighbor and so made a continuous line. I took one of them off and examined it closely. It was a bit of moist mud, rather clayey in consistency, and a little more gluey than mud usually is. It was comparatively smooth and well-rounded, and inclined me to believe that the ball had been molded in the bird's mouth before being stuck on the wall.

I sat down on a tool-box to watch the builders. Soon one of the birds flew in with a ball in its beak; but, seeing me, it stopped on the window-sill and debated whether to come on or not. I sat perfectly still, and turned my eyes on the nest rather than on the bird. A bird seems to feel safe if you pay no attention to it, I have learned. After a bit, it came over to the nest and, clinging to the rough wall, pressed the mud ball in place on the upper end of the segment, and flew away.

Later in the day the birds had completed a half circle

of these balls, seven and a half inches across and six inches deep. The next morning they began at the bottom of this pocket-shaped line of mud, and with alternate layers of mud and straws, well tamped together, they worked out and up until when the nest was completed it had the appearance of a sagging sweater pocket, or a quarter of a muskmelon glued to the wall.

Sometimes a bird worked clinging to the mud already laid, if not too fresh; at other times it would work from inside out or even brace itself against the garage wall above and hang head down while plastering. The mud was almost covered with the hay and hair used, so that it had the appearance of being a straw nest rather than a concrete one.

The barn swallow does not put his faith in "bricks without straw," as does the eaves swallow, and uses plenty of binding throughout. Here and there a chicken feather added to the ornamentation of the nest, though it did not blend with its actual construction. It looked more as though the mother might have added those delicate touches much as a human mother ties bows of ribbon on cradle and bassinet for beauty rather than use.

The birds did not work all day long. They were busy all morning, and again in the late afternoon, but seemed to rest or feed during the warmest part of the day. It usually took a bird about fifteen minutes to fly off for a mud ball, make it, and return. It took them nearly five days to get the nest finished, but when completed it looked as substantial as any barn swallow nest I ever saw, even though they had had to make the mud they used, as well as the balls.

When I measured the completed nest I found it to be seven and one-half inches by six, with a bulge of four and a half inches from the wall, and it weighed all of two pounds, mud, lining and all. It was lined with hay and feathers, which were well matted and were spread up over the rough wall of the garage as well as about the other sides. The lining had the circular shape of all birds' nests, in spite of the pocketlike conformity of the nest itself. I am certain that the lining was the mother's particular part, and that her heart, lukewarm at first toward the building plans of her mate, was tender with love for the little family to come as she sat there molding it to the shape of her own gentle breast.

I was hoping the birds would build the shelf that is sometimes put beside a swallow's nest, where the male may rest at night and from which the young can take their first look out over the world. But perhaps the fact that the loft was low and there were plenty of good perching places about convinced the birds that such labor was unnecessary, and particularly as they must make the mud themselves with which to build it. At least, it was not done, and when the young swallows were ready to fly they left the nest without any preliminary perching other than what they could do on the edge of their pocket nest.

XXVII

THE STAKE-DRIVER

I WAS spending Easter-week with friends in the country. Early on a mild evening, when everything was urging one out-of-doors, Callie, the young boy of the family, suggested that we go "thunder-pumping." So off we started for the sloughy bayou that cuts through one corner of the farm. At his advice I had donned his mother's rubber boots, and a short full skirt and warm mackinaw, and was prepared for walking, wading, climbing, or sitting still, at need.

I was delighted with the prospect of seeing and hearing the "booming bittern," that general favorite with poets.

"Do they stay all the year round?" I asked as we strode along.

"No, they've just got here for the spring," replied Callie. "I've heard a mire-drum for two nights now, and last evening I spotted one of them down here a short ways. It's such a comical sight to see them boom that I thought you'd want to see it, too."

"Yes, I do; but I know just how it is done, for I have read, in several old poems, that the bittern sticks its beak deep into mud while booming, which makes the roar, and ——"

"Then the poets don't know a thing about it," scoffed Callie, "for that is perzactly the way they do not do it. If you want to get facts about birds, don't consult the poets. Here we are."

He indicated a large tree which had been uprooted and lay almost horizontally from the bank out over a marshy, boggy bit of the bayou. We seated ourselves comfortably up among the branches, and prepared to enjoy the thunderer's serenade, whenever it should please him to commence.

The first sound we heard was the shrill, cricket-like *chirr-r-r-r* of piping-frogs in the reeds, almost ear-splitting in pitch.

"Good place for thunder-pumps," whispered Callie. "They live on peepers."

Suddenly he nudged me and pointed:

"There's one."

I followed his finger, but saw nothing in the reeds.

"Maybe you think it is a stake. There, close to that cattail."

Finally I discovered what looked like a wooden stake rising a little above the reeds. But there was a bright yellow eye not far below a shining black beak, and above a long, stick-like neck of yellowish-brown striped with dark. For some minutes I watched the bird, motionless, except when he ducked his head snakily and brought up a wriggling frog, which he would sometimes gulp down without ceremony, and sometimes playfully flirt in the air and catch on the drop.

It was graying into dusk, and we were afraid we were going to miss the musical part of the banquet. But the

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LEAST BITTERN

bittern evidently was not afraid of injuring his concert voice by singing on a full stomach, and dined heartily. Then our waiting was rewarded, as his had been. The bumper came out of the reeds and posed himself on a log, which gave him the twilight-bright, silvery water for a background and threw him into bold relief, and began to sing, or rather, to disgorge himself of notes.

Standing perfectly still and erect, with his bill pointing straight to the zenith, his head began very slowly to sink, down, down, down, while his body as slowly assumed a horizontal position. Soon the neck was in the shape of a horizontal S. Then the bird's head suddenly shot forward and a little downward, until the neck was almost straight again and in a line with his tail, and out came a very labored "Chunk-a-lunk." Perhaps it would not have sounded so labored had we not seen the pains he was put to in order to produce it.

After coughing out the three syllables, as if tuning up, or clearing his throat, he dropped his tail and raised his head, until he seemed to be gathering notes from the air above him, almost standing tiptoe to reach them. I have seen other soloists assume much the same attitude on the concert platform. Then, having filled his throat full of tones, he lowered his head slowly, writhed his neck into the same overturned S, shot his beak forward, and pumped out a quick series of "Chunk-a-lunk! Chunk-a-lunk! Chunk-a-lunk!"

"If we were farther off, we would hear just the *Chunk*," whispered Callie, "and then it would sound much like driving a stake."

The whole performance was repeated again and again,

and rapidly, too, considering how much effort it was for him to collect and distribute his notes. Had he been trying to commit suicide by tying his neck into a knot, the bittern would have gone through just such contortions, and produced just such a strangling gurgle of "chunks."

But the mate he was trying to attract was evidently charmed by it all, for after several minutes of this booming, she came slipping through the grasses, stood in silent admiration until he had finished, and then went away with him.

It was now almost dark, but across the bayou came the more distant thumping of another stake-driver in full action, whose "hollow booming," although but a long-drawn "Chunk!" was most pleasing and musical, softened and enriched to a long, quavering croon by coming over the water through the moist spring night-air. We were sorry when he, too, won his mate, or at least, suspended his concert for the evening. Each evening for the remainder of my visit, Callie and I made it a point to attend this twilight concert of the bitterns, quite as pleasing in its way as the coloratura performances of more tuneful birds.

One bit of amusement we got out of it was interpreting the bird's notes, and we found the following in his vocabulary:

"Dunk-a-dug!"
"Pump-a-gah!"
"Plug-a-lug!"
"Huck-a-luck!"

One afternoon we ran across a bittern that was feed-

ing, and, as always, he assumed a dead-stick appearance to deceive us. We tried to test his endurance, and stood until we were tired, a good half-hour by my watch, and all the time he posed there, head uplifted and motionless. Finally Callie announced himself defeated, and walked toward the bird, which did not move until he was but a few feet from the marshy pool where the bittern stood. Then, with a sudden return to life, he uttered a hoarse "howck," and leaped into the air and away in his slow, lumbering flight.

Callie found a bittern nest, too, a mere bundle of sticks, coarse grass, and sedges placed directly in the top of a rounded bog of swamp weeds, well concealed among the reeds. There were four eggs, of drab, or isabella color, unspotted. I hoped they would hatch during my stay there, but my vacation week was up before the shells were broken. The mother was a brave bird, and always remained on the nest until almost touched, then slid away like a shadow and was not seen as long as we remained near the nest.

But the thunder-pump is not too timid to put up a good fight when seized, as Callie demonstrated for my benefit, by clapping his hat over Madam Bittern as she was creeping off her nest. She struggled to escape, but finding herself securely held in his hands, she flopped quickly over on her back and clawed with all toes, squawking with fear. When released, she ran a few steps until she could rise in the air, and flap away, sputtering to herself. But it did not drive her from her nest, for the next day she was brooding her eggs when we went back, so perhaps she was more offended than frightened.

XXVIII

LOONS AT PLAY

A PARTY of us was camping on the shore of one of the lakes in northern Minnesota. It was a quiet and secluded spot,—just the place for a real vacation to rest and eat and study nature.

We had risen at seven o'clock one morning and were congratulating ourselves that we had missed nothing of the beautiful day which promised, when our host strolled up from the beach.

"You lazybones missed something by not being up early this morning," he announced with evident relish. "I saw the most wonderful sight a little while ago—a family of loons playing crack the whip."

We begged him to tell us about it, but all he would say was that it had been a marvelous sight, and that if we would get up early the next morning we could see it for ourselves.

It was just growing light the next day when our host led a crowd of sleepy, yawning "nature-lovers" through the wet grass down to the beach. He told us to settle ourselves behind a screen of hazel scrub and keep silent.

"Loons!" he whispered, pointing to some dark spots which were floating on the water some distance from shore. "Same family I saw yesterday morning, I suppose, as they are in the same position. That one off there by himself is the father; those others in a little group are the mother and young. A loon may be an addle-pated

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

LOON

fellow in some ways, but he knows enough to go off by himself when he wishes to sleep and rest."

We watched the dark spots attentively for a little time, but as they did not stir presently we were all nodding and dozing. Suddenly a long-drawn cry, like the shriek of a human being in agony, awoke us with a start, although no one made any noise.

"That's the male bird waking up," our host explained. "Watch the others now."

We rubbed our sleepy eyes and stared out across the gray-white water. The mother and her three youngsters had wakened, and were moving slowly over toward the father, who was also approaching them. When they all came together they began to frisk about in a merry circle, as if wishing each other a good morning and a pleasant day.

"Is that all?" asked our hostess in evident disappointment.

"Sh! There's more coming, unless you spoil it by frightening them away," cautioned our host, peeping through the screen of brush.

Presently the family fell into line, with the parents at the ends and the small fry in the middle. Then, as if at a silent signal, all of them as one bird, lifted their wings and started running across the water. They looked like a lot of school children racing. With their wings half-extended, and their thin legs moving like lightning, they sped on for a full quarter of a mile along the shore. They traveled at an almost incredibly fast pace, too. If you have ever skipped stones on the water, you know what those loons looked like, as, with a great splashing,

they skimmed along side by side and left five rippling wakes behind them.

Suddenly, without seeming to lower their wings or to pause for an instant, they wheeled about in a short circle and came skimming back over their course. Two of them, the mother and one of the youngsters, fell behind slightly in the process of turning the circle, and could not catch up with the others, so it seemed that the joke of this crack-the-whip game was on them. We could hardly keep from laughing outright to see how the three loons sped ahead to keep the lead they had gained, and how the two behind tried desperately to catch up with them.

When they reached the starting place the winners paused for a moment while the others came up and all got in line once more. We could hear them chuckling softly, for all the world like a lot of children at play. Then they stretched out their wings and once more sent their feet flying over the water.

We sat there in open-eyed and open-mouthed astonishment at the evident glee with which the loons kept up their sport. Their enjoyment of it did not seem to abate with one or two races, nor did they seem to get tired, for they kept it up until the silvery water began to grow rosy in the dawn.

Then the game ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The birds whirled back to the starting point, and gathered in a little knot to talk and laugh it over, until the father with a farewell whoop arose in the air and flew off, leaving the mother and little ones to breakfast alone, which they promptly proceeded to do.

XXIX

ON THE MOVE

One day late in June we were motoring along a country road in North Dakota. Suddenly our driver, an enthusiastic sportsman and nature-lover, stopped our gay chatter with a warning "Hush! See! Just diving into the weeds beside the road there ahead!"

We followed his index finger, but saw only the rustling grasses.

"What?" we all asked, all interest as to what the mysterious something might have been.

"Then you didn't see them?" exclaimed our driver somewhat impatiently. "Keep a close watch ahead; it's worth seeing."

Consequently we were all on the alert when presently he again bade us look. That time we were not disappointed. A family of mallard ducks was enjoying a walk along the road. The mother was in the lead, followed by a flock of young ducklings in single file, Indian fashion. They were waddling along in the dust, gabbling sociably as they went, exactly like a human family out for a good time.

The little ones were as cute as could be, in their downy coats of greenish brown or grayish yellow, all paddling obediently along in their mother's wake and wagging their tiny stumps of tails in imitation of her gait. Our

driver stopped the car and we watched them toddle on ahead.

"Where are they going?" I asked, full of curiosity at seeing a family of wild ducks parading along a country road several miles from any water.

"They're making for water—probably a marshy slough on ahead that they have intuitive knowledge of."

"But how did they get way out here, miles from any water?"

"They were hatched in some one's hay or grain field, perhaps."

"But I supposed wild ducks nested in sloughs, or at least close to water."

"Not always. Good nesting sites are not confined to the immediate vicinity of lakes and ponds. They are frequently found several miles back from water of any kind—in open prairies where a tuft of rank grass will cover the eggs, or even in coarse bushes on a wooded hillside. The grain-fields and hay-lands all over the State are full of ducks' nests. Splendid places they are, too, for the nests are made in May, after the grain and grass are well up, and offer protection to the mother from hawks and night prowlers; and the little ones, as you see, are hatched and on the move before haying and harvesting commence.

"Occasionally the drake is in the lead; but usually the mother has the whole responsibility of getting the young to water, just as she has had in bringing them into the world. She has sense enough to take the traveled highways; they make easier walking for the little ones than the thick grass and weeds. And she knows when

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

MALLARD

to duck under cover, too. There comes an auto now. Watch her."

The mother mallard kept steadily on down the road, in the wheel-track, her flock of nine close at her heels. But suddenly, with a sharp clack of alarm, she disappeared in the weeds, and all the little ones ducked after her. It was several minutes after the car had passed us before the family reappeared in the road, and that some little distance beyond the place where they had left it, showing they had not stopped their journey while under cover. They waddled on as before until we in turn put them to flight.

XXX

KILLDEER THE DANDY

Several August vacations have given me a nodding acquaintance with the dainty killdeer,—which, since he has named himself, should be spelled "killdear," I think, because it must be his vast pride in his fetching costume and his confidence in his foppish appearance which inspire the cry.

He is a French dandy in feathers, the Incroyable of birddom, with his dark ash gray broadcloth coat, white waistcoat and breeches, yellow hose, white collar, black "choke" tie, jaunty gray cap, and carrying an ebony cane under the arm so that it just shows along the edge of his elbow. The spruce policeman blue jay cannot equal him, or the dapper mannikin cedar bird rival him. For killdeer the dandy has not only the costume, but the air as well, which the rollicking blue jay and the dreamy cedar bird most certainly have not.

See killdeer tripping on light feet, darting first from one bog or stone to another, as if disdaining to soil his immaculate garb with the oozy soil where he must feed. A penniless dandy walking down a muddy street, to seek his breakfast in some cheap restaurant, would carry himself just so. Back in the fields his fastidiousness is

a trifle less noticeable, perhaps, but since the sort of tidbits he craves are found in slime and mud, he must search for them there, in spite of his apparent dislike for anything unclean.

He is an epicure, too, and enjoys a good meal as well as the next bird, as you can easily learn by watching him sampling various displays as he trips along. During the warmest part of the day, after feeding all morning, he likes to take a siesta while digesting his breakfast and awaiting the supper of worms and bugs which come out in the cool of the evening. He stands on one leg in a patch of dry gravel or on a sun-warmed stone, near enough to the water so that when he opens a sleepy eye, he can admire his own reflection in the mirror before him. At least, that is his favorite attitude on sunny August afternoons. Perhaps in these day-dreams he reflects on his own good looks, and trusts to them for protection while he drowses, for he never seems the least bit afraid of passers-by. I am sure that after admiring the jaunty little Beau Brummel so posed, I could never bring myself to harm him in any way.

I have admired the killdeer at a distance every summer I have seen him, and in North Dakota he is to be seen skirting the edge of any slough or pond, no matter how near the road it brings him. He is absolutely fearless,—which adds to my belief that his plaintive "killdeer" is not apprehension at all, or fear of personal harm, but is inspired wholly by his own self-esteem.

His aloofness and self-sufficiency had rather kept me in awe of him, so to speak, and I never really felt that I knew him. Always seeing him with his society manners

on, I wanted to know him more intimately by visiting him at home, with his family, and catching him *en dishabille,* so to speak. This desire was granted, when recently I made my North Dakota trip in May, and saw quite a different killdeer from the one I had always seen before.

Every time I went into the pasture I found solitary killdeers flitting about everywhere, with other thoughts under their big caps than food. It was spring-time, and killdeer must prance up and down for sheer love of living, and for his exuberant delight in knowing that the mate he had won was quietly brooding her eggs somewhere not far away.

Whenever I approached a certain spot in the pasture where it cornered a wheat-field and ran down into a little boggy pond, I noticed one of these little Prince-of-Dandies would suddenly appear from nowhere and fly around above me, calling out a shrill, incessant, "Kill-dee, kill-dee, dee, dee, dee!"

"There must be a nest somewhere near," I decided, after a few days of this commotion, and commenced searching for it.

I started at the corner of the pasture, and went diagonally across it, from wheat-field to pond and back again, the anxious bird circling above my head all the while. I had made over a dozen of these closely parallel lines, when all at once I flushed "Dear" herself from the ground. She joined her mate and circled about me, shrieking as plaintively as he, and had my conscience not been free of any intent to harm them, their alarm and grief would have caused me to abandon the search.

Feeling that my curiosity could do them no real harm, I kept on with my plan.

Soon I had found the nest, or rather, the nesting site,—a mere hollow with a few sticks and pebbles roughly outlining a frame for the eggs. It was the eggs which attracted my attention rather than the nest; there were four of them, each as rich in color as spring-time butter and their pointed ends autographed all over with scrawls and blotches of faded black ink. Like many a dashing and jaunty individual, killdeer has a mate who is a woefully poor pen-artist.

As I stood looking at the eggs, the mother, or at least I chose to believe it was she, for the two resemble each other as closely as twins, suddenly dropped down on the ground almost at my feet. For a moment I was deceived into thinking she was really dying, but as soon as I stooped to pick her up, she deftly eluded my hand with several wild flops that carried her quite a considerable distance away from the nest.

Then I realized I was being favored with a show of that deceit with which many bird mothers often seek to protect their young, and to study this touch of killdeer psychology, I obligingly followed her. The poor, lame, broken-winged creature promised capture if I would only pursue her, but she slyly kept just out of my reach in spite of her lamentable condition. On and on she tumbled and tottered until I was some distance from the nest. Then with a twitter of victory which I could not begrudge her, she spread her wings and flew quickly away toward the pond. As for killdeer himself, he hovered above us all the way, crying his alarm and then his

relief, until she announced her victory, when he flew away with her. Their peeps and shrieks as they paraded along the edge of the pond, although they acted as if entirely unconscious of my presence, were like so many jeers and jibes at my gullibility.

I retraced my steps as well as I could, but long before I found the nest again the parents were back circling above me and calling piteously. To relieve their distress I went away, but every day thereafter I made a short call on Dame Killdeer.

She never grew accustomed to me, and would try to toll me away, or scold me away, all the while I lingered near the nest. I was anxious to see a baby killdeer newly hatched, and didn't let her anxiety prevent my daily visits. But to spare the mother any undue worry, I made a practice of standing afar off and studying the eggs through my opera-glasses.

One forenoon, when I made my morning call, the hatching was on. Two little ones were already drying themselves in the sun, and to my astonishment were daintily pecking at their discarded shells, stowing a cargo of grit aboard in preparation for the real feeding they must soon have. The mother, too, who did not leave the vicinity of the nest for long, even to scold at me, helped the bantlings dispose of the empty shells by eating some of them,—an economical device also useful in concealing the presence of the young, in case they were obliged to take to their legs for safety.

That evening I heard killdeer cries from the wheat-field when I passed by, and found the old birds there in close attendance upon four little striped, downy fluffs in

black-billed gray caps much too big for them, and dark necklaces like their father's. But although the little fellows were almost lost in their great caps, which made them look dressed up in their father's cast-off headgear, and gave them a top-heavy appearance quite out of proportion to their little darning-needle legs, and threatened to send them head over heels at every step, they were still able to run over the clods and dodge wheat-stems at good speed. I tried to catch one, and found the day-old baby quick as a flash at dodging my hand.

They ran about like tiny chickens, peeping shrilly and always with a question mark at the end of their "pee-ep," as if anxious to learn all there was to know about the big world where they found themselves. I was thankful the family did not leave the neighborhood, and enjoyed visiting them daily. Such independent little mites as those youngsters were,—asking little from their parents except companionship, being quite able to find their own food when it was necessary.

Their efforts at learning to fly were a revelation. Ground dwellers as they were, yet needing the power of flight as soon as any bird, they were fully ten days old before they could lift their bodies from the ground. From the first they realized the importance of their pinions, and trusted implicitly in their possibilities, for in running, particularly to put distance between themselves and me, they would lift their downy flappers and scud along head first over clods and tussocks. As the feathers began to come out they ran more and more a-tip-toe, until before their wings were fully feathered they could skim along just over the ground, not more

than two inches in the air. It was not until they were almost three weeks old that they could really fly, but by that time they had joined the flocks which edged the pond, and I could not tell my killdeer family from the dozens of others that frequented the spot.

XXXI

A FEATHERED NARCISSUS

"Do you know the prothonotary warbler, or the golden swamp warbler?" asked my friend, the surveyor, who sat on the wooded bank of a northern Minnesota river and admired the landscape while his wife prepared a picnic lunch for us. And as he asked the question he pointed to a willow stump on the edge of the water, and added, "That would make an ideal nesting-site for a pair of them."

"Tell me everything you know about the bird," I commanded. "I know absolutely nothing, except that there is such a bird, though why named prothonotary? And what does it mean?"

"Because in times past the chief clerks in the English Courts of Common Pleas and King's Bench were so designated, and their insignia of office was a yellow robe. So, because this warbler is clad chiefly in orange yellow, he inherits the name.

"And he is the vainest creature that ever wore fine feathers, too. The waxwing is a well-dressed bird, with plenty of leisure time to sit about doing nothing, but you never see him posed over a pool of water just to admire himself. When the waxwing takes such a perch, it is merely his headquarters for a raid against gnats. But the prothonotary, like Narcissus of old, is there for

frank self-adoration. Let me tell you of a pair I watched one summer, when surveying in southern Minnesota.

"I discovered the bird by accident, or rather, as a reward for curiosity. I was camping beside an overflowed, swampy bayou, and one Sunday, while sitting under a tree on the bank, I heard the monotonous call of a solitary sandpiper, with peculiar variations, like 'peet-ti-peet-ti-peet!' and so clear and ringing as to be almost ear-splitting in its intensity. Hoping to catch the bird at new tricks, I whipped out my glasses and turned them on the sound. What was my surprise, instead of finding a sandpiper, or anything resembling one, to locate the voice coming from a yellow-robed bird sitting in the shade of a willow branch! I could not then name it, but after several days' observation of the bird and consultation of my bird books, I identified it as the prothonotary or golden swamp warbler. It is not common so far north as Minnesota, but I have since seen it in numbers farther south, in Illinois, so am sure my classification was correct.

"It was a male bird, in full plumage, which had caught my attention, but I soon learned he was not alone, and to my joy, that a nest was in process of construction. Or rather, of reconstruction. For his mate, a green-yellow copy of his golden glory, came dodging out of a hole in a willow stump which stood a few feet from the bank and some rods up stream from where I lay. It was an odd stump, I remember, like that one there," and he pointed again to the willow. "The tree had once had two main branches, but one of them had been snapped off about four feet above the water, much

like the one there. The stump had decayed, and been hollowed out by a small woodpecker,—downy, perhaps,—and was now several seasons old, and had been occupied in turn by chickadees and bluebirds, when Dame Downy had no further use for it, and now Madame Warbler was moving in."

"How did you know it was an old nest?"

"By the worn look of the edges, where birds had gone in and out. And I knew it had been built by a small woodpecker because it was just the right sized opening and depth and had all the qualifications a downy woodpecker demands of a nesting site. Madame Warbler seized a straw that lay on top of the stump, and took it into the hollow. She was gone a short time; when she came out, her mate saluted her with his shrill, sandpiperish note, and flew away with her. He was soon back with a dry grass blade in his beak, which he laid on the stump, tamping it in a little with his beak so it wouldn't blow away. Then he flitted restlessly from twig to twig, over the water, until Madame returned with a beakful of material, which she piled on top of his scanty offering. She went in and out, arranging the material to suit herself, while her mate, instead of helping her, prinked on first one branch and then the other above the water. He did peep sociably to her, however. At that time, I thought it was encouragement or advice, in regard to the nest-building, but as I grew to know him better I reversed my decision and became convinced that his chirps were invariably commands for her to take time to admire his beautiful reflection.

"I soon learned to interpret his words to be 'Sweet-

tr-sweet-tr-sweet-tr-sweet!' inspired by the satisfied contemplation of his bright image in the water mirror below. For all through the nest building, and incubation and even the feeding, which kept the little mother so busy for weeks, this golden-clad dandy spent his time in self-admiration. The shaded water below the stump made an ideal mirror for him, and there he was to be seen the livelong day. Often he would sit in a branch that stood out over the river, and sing his own praises in those ear-splitting tones that had first attracted my attention. Then he would hop down nearer the water, and almost over his little mate, who, by craning her head out to look, could catch the shining reflection of the gorgeous being she could not see. Then he would go to a twig that just cleared his dark water-mirror, and preen and praise himself anew. He was as restless and active as a wren, but not busy; just seeking new places to admire himself, new mirrors for his splendor.

"I have watched him fly from the willow over the water to a cottonwood some feet away, and back again, and repeat this indefinitely, like a girl in a new party dress, mincing back and forth before her mirror,—or a fop who must take a look at himself in every window he passes, and is never weary of the sight. Then, too, at times the bird made a sort of ceremonial of this self-worship, by flying over the water very slowly, with wings trembling and fluttering in an ecstasy of delight, head raised and tail expanded. And whenever he did this, he sang a most tender, sweet warble, so low and soft that it was almost a hum, but full of trills and tinkles and runs.

"He never warbled this canticle of praise except on the wing, and while performing this hovering flight. And always his little mate was charmed by it into leaning out from her Juliet balcony to watch his musical whirl, and would even throw in a soft little 'Sweet, sweet, sweet!' of her own by way of applause.

"Well, I watched that family until the three young, tousled copies of their mother were able to perch in the branches of the willow and yell for food. But I never saw the father, inveterate dandy that he was, devote much time to looking after them. The little mother did practically all the foraging, and the three children had their lucky stars to thank that she was plain, and workaday. Otherwise they would have starved to death. For if the father did start out on a hunting trip, he only dallied at it, keeping close to the river bank, and gathering his offerings from the water-logged, moss-grown stumps and flooded bushes where he could keep himself in sight. Even when wandering about a tree-trunk for food, he was careful to spend most of his time on the water-side of it. He caught his own food at the water's edge, and only just enough for himself, too. I never saw him take food to his mate, while she was brooding, and but seldom did he have anything for a wailing infant.

"His little mate was his opposite in character as in appearance. She had none of his vanity, and would plunge out of sight in the underbrush or go swinging off over the meadows looking for food, and forgot her plain little self in caring for her brood."

XXXII

NEIGHBOR DOWNY

A DOWNY WOODPECKER spent several weeks about our yard last winter, and the length of his visit we hope was due to the enthusiastic reception he received the very first day he called.

He made his initial appearance one cold February day in a young apple tree in the side yard, volplaning into it from no one knew where. I sat looking out of the window, I remember, pitying any living creature which must be abroad that cold and frosty morning, when like a dab of something moist and sticky the bird fell ker-plunk against the tree-trunk and stuck there, head up, just as if he had frozen instantly.

He was a pretty sight in his cape of snowy ermine and glossy velvet,—his cassock, which, so Thoreau says, "he wears open behind to show his white robe,"—and the burning coal in his topknot to keep his wits warm and wide-awake, which they never failed to be the many days we studied him. I called my sisters, and although downy must have seen our three faces looking out at him whenever he glanced our way, he appeared ignorant of our presence, or at least indifferent to it.

Preliminary to setting to work, he gave a few quick flirts of his head to right and to left, which may have been a precautionary measure, but which my sister

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

DOWNY WOODPECKER

termed "rolling up his sleeves and spitting on his hands before starting." Then, with no other "by your leave," or "with your permission," he set to work in a brisk, businesslike way which seemed to say:

"Maybe it is cold, and you have good excuse for staying cooped up there, but as for me,—I keep warm by working."

He next pecked sharply at the trunk, this side and that, as if warning all grubs in the tree, from base to tip, of his arrival; after which, either because he heard worms stirring below him, or felt he had commenced too high up the trunk, he took half-a-dozen quick hops which were nothing less than a graceful run backwards, and stopped a full eighteen inches below where he had alighted first. He systematically bugged that trunk in three parallel trails; that is, he worked up one side with occasional darts to right and left as duty called, ran down to the base again, worked up another side, and then again. The trunk finished, he started up a main branch, and fed all the way up its divisions and subdivisions until he was hanging to a slender twig, breast skyward and shoulders earthward. While hanging there, he must have heard a grub stirring below, for he swung about and hung head down like a chickadee for an instant while pecking a twiglet just off his route.

This branch finished, downy was back to the base of a second one, and started on a patrol of its bark. Watching him at work on the smaller branches and twigs of the tree, we were interested to notice his skillful way of clinging to them. They were much too slender for him to use his claws front and back, like climbers, as he al-

days did when on the trunk and main branches. When on the twigs, downy changed his tactics and clung with his feet by wrapping his four long toes around the slender withes like so many fingers. Up a twig he would go, foot over foot, to the very tip-top; then instead of hopping backward as he invariably did on the trunk, or flying down as he might easily have done, he would simply loosen his grasp of the twig just enough to allow him to slide down it, like a boy shinning down a rope or a pole. Arrived at the base of a fresh twig, up he would start again, foot over foot. I have seen him shin up and down every one of a clump of twigs on a golden willow, and if he got an injurious egg or grub at every pick of his busy beak, he saved the tree twice over in a day.

We were particularly pleased to have him caring for the young apple and cherry trees in the backyard, and to encourage him to stay about them, we tacked a small lump of suet in each tree and ornamented them with strings of cranberries. He ate both, but preferred the suet, no doubt because it was richer in heat units and did not freeze as icy as the berries. When chickadees, snowbirds, sparrows and other downies came to share these goodies, downy was most hospitable and let them eat as long as they wished, without offering to disturb them.

"Peek-peek!" he would chatter, over and over as if warning the grubs that soon a remorseless collector would be presenting them with an urgent bill, and to us it was a very cheerful sound when heard through the winter stillness.

We learned another grubbing peculiarity of downy,

and that is his habit of dragging his wings over the bark when patrolling the larger branches of the trunk. We could not guess why he did this, unless it was to augment the clumpity-clump of his feet with the scrapity-scrape of his wings, and so frighten the grubs into uneasy squirms which would betray their presence to his sensitive ear. That he listened for them was very evident, as he constantly cocked one ear or the other barkward and stood on the alert for the slightest stir beneath.

One day we saw him working busily on an apple-tree trunk, sitting there on the handy platform of his own tail feathers, and chiseling a short-cut tunnel to some buried larva. "Clickety-click-click" would go his beak, then he would listen, then chisel again. Ere long he had penetrated to the grub's burrow and had him fast. The worm buckled and twisted and fought for foothold, apparently, for downy must give several deft tweaks before the grub was out,—a big fat white one we could see from the window. He perched there a bit in triumph, or to get his breath, then seemed to decide that too choice a morsel to gobble right down then and there. For instead of swallowing it at a gulp, as he had always before disposed of his catches,—at least, as far as we had hitherto observed,—this time he flew over to a lombardy poplar, inserted his prey into a cracked knot-hole, and with a few blows of his beak tamped the grub in well. Then he flew back to the apple tree as much as to say:

"Now I've got you transplanted where you can do no harm, I'll go on with my work and save you for a banquet later."

Why downy selected the poplar tree for his larder was

revealed a few days later, when we saw him fly to the tree and fail to reappear.

Upon investigation we discovered a small opening, only one and seven-eighths inches in diameter, in one of the branches some distance from the ground; and that it had been excavated for his special use was evident from the chips and splinters half buried in the snow at the base of the tree. We got a small boy to climb the tree and investigate downy's den. He reported downy fast asleep there, head under wing, and the sun shining in on him like a warm coverlet.

On three different occasions he was found there, asleep in the daytime, warming and resting. Later in the day, when his siesta was over, downy would come galloping out of his snug boudoir, ready for work, which was not limited to our trees, but extended to all those within the neighborhood, as our fellow suburbanites reported. Downy spent the night in his den, of course, as our boy friend discovered when he climbed the tree with a flashlight. And we later saw him take to his den about sundown, like a weary laborer who has earned a night's repose.

Along in March downy disappeared. No doubt he had set his cap for a mate, and had gone to the woods a-wooing, for we saw him no more when the days began to grow warmer.

XXXIII

OUR FEATHERED GAMIN

House Sparrows are true street Arabs; they live by their wits in the midst of the rush and roar and self-centered goings and comings of a city throng, and they learn to skirt danger and to gather food for themselves in the most unpromising places. Their underfoot existence gives them a quick glance and a deft motion as natural as a sixth and a seventh sense; they will eye you and retreat or approach with the same air of a newsie or a bootblack who feels instinctively whether to avoid or seek your company. And in their bright, restless eyes and their dingy, unkempt appearance the two gamins, feathered and unfeathered, seem twin souls in kindred bodies.

We have hundreds of house sparrows here in the heart of the city, and no warfare can exterminate them. But in the suburbs, ten miles distant, although other birds find the localities good nesting sites, there are spots where the house sparrow is unknown. Like the human street Arab the house sparrow wants to be right down-town, where the picking is good and where there is plenty of congenial noise and dirt, and crowds of his own species.

The same bird no doubt frequents the same locality,

within the very limited range of a block or so. In fact I know this to be the case. One day, as I was going down the street, I heard the Italian who keeps a fruit stand on a corner calling out something. I glanced up, to find him pointing into the street and laughing:

"He no tail! He no tail!"

I looked, and saw a full-grown house sparrow which by some ill fortune had lost that most useful member altogether. Not a single tail feather did it possess. For several weeks thereafter I made it a point to look for this particular bird when I passed along there, and usually found it somewhere about, feeding in the street or gutter, or hopping about in the grass on the square.

And often, when I could not locate it, the Italian fruit-vender could point it out to me, smiling with delight to find another person taking an interest in the bird.

Its flight was peculiar; having no rudder to steer it, it could not turn while on the wing, but must tack back and forth in the general direction it wished to go, always alighting between tacks. If it wished to fly straight away, well and good; off it could go as well as any bird. But if it wished to make a turn, it must fly diagonally across, alight on the ground, or on a hydrant or mail-box, face in the new direction, and fly off from there. It was the straightest flying bird I ever saw,—in fact, that was the only way it could fly. Most birds, and particularly house sparrows, go darting this way and that; but this bird never did so. He always went straight ahead, and did all his turning on his toes. Finally, the cripple was either killed or decided to leave

that part of the city for one less active and busy and so less dangerous.

House sparrows have a fondness equal to a child's for going up and down steps. I have noticed this many times, while standing at a window and watching a store opposite, where a half-dozen rounds of iron ladder lead from the top-story window to the roof. I have seen a sparrow that was sunning itself on this top window landing of the fire-escape suddenly leave the spot and commence going up the ladder, one step at a time, and carefully taking each one in turn. Arrived at the top, he would be quite sure to turn about and go hoppity-hop down each one of those steps to the landing again. Not content with that, he would go up and down again, many times over, apparently with no other purpose than pleasure. Of course they might be looking for food, as one observer stated, though I very much doubt it, as they do not pause to peck or to feed, and the way they go up and then down immediately, and so over and over the same ground, and on the bare rungs of an iron ladder, would indicate that they enjoy the rhythm of those regulated jumps, and are making a game of it, just as children often play up and down steps for the fun of it.

I have seen one sparrow go up while another went down, and then the two about face, the one go down while the other went up. I have also watched one sparrow follow another up the ladder and down again, a step or two behind all the way. So they must do this for a game, and though they play it solemnly enough, no doubt they get as much pleasure out of it as children

playing hop-scotch, or any other game in which stated movements must be gone through.

One day I was going down a long flight of steps from one level of the street to another, one of those makeshifts to which a city must resort when founded upon a hill. As I started at the top of the eighteen steps a house sparrow commenced at the bottom step to come up. He hopped from one step to the one above, with as much speed as I was making going down, so we met at the landing in the center of the flight where a tread of double width makes a sort of resting-place for tired legs.

He kept far to his side and I kept to mine, each of us tending to his own affairs and not annoying the other. The house sparrow stopped at the landing, as do most people who ascend the flight, and particularly if they be round and puffy like a sparrow. He eyed me, his head on one side; then he gave a sociable chirp and continued on his way to the top of the flight, while I went on my way down.

I glanced back to see if he took in every step, and was pleased to notice that he did so, as faithfully as though his wings had been mere arms. He did not trouble to look back at me, and so lost no time, and arrived at the top step while I still had two left to go down. He paused there a moment to get his breath or to make further plans, or to view the city from that level,—just as I have seen humans do. Then he spread his wings and flew away.

Another time I met a sparrow hopping down this same flight as I was going up, but he grew frightened as I approached and flew the remainder of the way down.

Often we forget that the house sparrow belongs to the musical finch family, until some incident reminds us of the fact. One February day, about five in the afternoon, as I was entering my flat, I got my first hint of spring,—a sharp, clear, sprightly chirp which sounded as gay and bright as a robin's early spring call. I even looked about, half-expecting to see the red-vested herald, and in his place discovered only a dingy English sparrow in his thick winter overcoat, standing on the dripping porch eaves and facing full toward the setting sun. But the tone of his voice was quite different from his muffled winter note, or his pettish summer call. If his race had not buried their song talent too deeply under a bushel of city squalor ever to find it, this house sparrow would have been singing a merry madrigal of spring music that his cousin the song sparrow might envy.

As it was, the best he could do was the monotonous family squeak, which he was making truly musical, either intentionally or because he unconsciously sought to express himself in song. For he gave his note a quick, alert enunciation quite robin-like in effect. Perhaps it was a reminiscence of last April, when robin chirped all day long in the willow tree back of the flats, and in thinking of it he was tempted to try it himself. While I listened he called many times, eyeing me pertly as though so pleased with the effect that he wished me to take notice and admire it, too. But perhaps he was not vain; perhaps he was advising me to have faith that spring was coming, as surely as icicles melt and eaves drip dry in February sunshine. When he flew into the

snowy street and began pecking about there, all business once more, his musical ambitions were forgotten and he was only a dumpy English sparrow again, with a monotonous, grating peep for his only song.

There is one performance in which this species excels,—chanting the sun up on a summer morning. If you would hear the house sparrows' morning worship, you must be awake betimes some warm summer day, for their hour of song is an early one indeed. I discovered this musical rite of theirs one July daybreak, when insomnia had kept me awake all night. Just as dawn was brightening in the east I began to hear single, sleepy sparrow peeps in the poplars along the street. The chirps gradually became more wide-awake and more numerous; but there was no confusion. Instead, as the birds awoke and joined in the aubade, they seemed to catch the rhythm and to add volume and continuity without disorder.

In a few minutes there were hundreds of sparrow voices joined in one vast anthem to the dawn. The effect when the birds were in full chorus was weird, yet beautiful. It was like a high, continuous croon, or keen, rising and falling in regular pulses, growing louder and then fainter, but never dying out completely. And the crescendo and diminuendo were as smooth and gliding as though made by one throat, instead of being a combination of many so-called unmusical voices.

Nor could I distinguish among the multitude any single chirp or individual note,—it was like an immense chorus of well-trained voices united in some dignified old chant, or chorale, no one voice predominating over

the others, and all under the control of a master conductor.

This aubade continued until full sunrise, when it began to die out as it had begun, until as the voices fell away, I could make out individual chirps once more. The festival over, the various choristers were bidding each other good day and starting off on their round of daily duties. Soon I heard here and there the sharp businesslike calls which sparrows utter during their working hours, then the milkman climbing the back stairs, and the day was begun.

Since then I have listened for this morning song of the sparrow hosts, and although the bird's daytime voice is most unmusical and prosaic, when a multitude of them unite in their throbbing early morning chant, there is a beauty, a richness, a solemnity of effect no single bird's song, no matter how musical the individual, can ever equal. The most noticeable qualities of the chant are its deep harmony, and its decided ebb and flow in volume. On a quiet morning, when there is not enough breeze to lift a leaf, and no other life is yet astir, the chant rises and falls with the unbroken smoothness of a swell in mid-ocean. But when there is a breeze, it takes on the cling-clang of a chiming silvery-toned bell, now near and now far.

The best thing about the house sparrow is the fact that he is often the city child's only feathered companion; to many thousands, "bird" is but a synonym for "house sparrow." One morning last summer, when the young nestlings were beginning to tumble from their cribs, three-year-old Buddy, who lives just across the

street, found one of them in the gutter. He tried to pick it up, but although the bird was not strong enough to fly, it was spry enough to keep just beyond Buddy's reach, and gave him a merry chase. Buddy called it a "chicken," and kept calling and reaching out for it, only to have it elude his hand. Soon a small dog joined the sport, which aroused all Buddy's alarm for the safety of his "chicken."

"Here, here," he called and held the dog back with all his small strength. "You are too big to play with chickens."

Most of us rejoice over the death of a sparrow, thinking it is one more of the pests gone, but to Buddy the death of this one would have been a real calamity, and he kept the dog away until the bird was able to flop off into the grass, and I came to the rescue and put it in a tree.

I suppose no grown-up really admires the house sparrow, yet, since we seem doomed to his companionship, we may as well study him with an open mind, as an individual or in a crowd, and search for interesting traits and odd doings to brighten his monotonous coat and note.

I confess I rather like the pudgy bird, dirty, homely, underfoot, yet with a bright eye which always seems to be appraising me as a good enough sort of person in my way, although inferior to himself in most respects. That sidewise hop as I come near,—perhaps there is as much aversion as caution in it. Who knows? He comes close to my window and peers in at me when I think myself alone; probably he also peeps into my

heart and judges me impartially. I may deceive mortals into thinking me somewhat better than I am; but I cannot deceive him,—his eye is too keen and piercing for that.

XXXIV

PIPERS ON THE LINKS

No, this is not a description of a bagpipe concert given on a golf course, but only a bit of bird gossip which has to do with the spotted sandpiper,—or tiltup, teetertail, peet-weet, sandlark, teeterer, whichever name is your favorite for the little bird.

One summer morning my brother invited me to go down to the golf links and make the rounds with him for company. This I did, until on the way to the sixth hole, which is in one corner of the course where a small gully runs diagonally across the field, leaving just room for one hole on the far side of the hazard.

"You'd better stay on this side," advised Brother, glancing at my shoes. "Those are pretty high heels, and you'll be sure to wobble over the stones. You wait here and I'll be back soon as I make the sixth."

So I sat down on the bank and waited. Soon my attention was attracted to some tiny little long-legged birds which were flitting about on the gravel down in the gulch. It was a small flock of tiltups, no bigger than robins, and as active as the grasshoppers upon which they were feeding.

"Peet-weet! peet-weet! peet!" came their needle-like

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

SPOTTED SANDPIPER

chirps as they dodged over the gravel and up the grassy bank.

There were but five of them, and from the way they kept together, I suspected it was a family party, gathering its daily rations. The grass was full of grasshoppers,—those juicy, appetizing red and black ones which must tempt any bird that sees them to eat and eat, long after his hunger is satisfied. There were pretty millers and moths in plenty, too, and the birds were finding it good picking. Indeed, the numberless hoppers they saw at every turn were distracting enough, to judge by the way the birds darted here and there, their stubby tails jerking to right and left all the while in nervous energy. No wonder their manner is so "self-satisfied," as one author describes the bird, if being well-fed is conducive to this enviable opinion of one's self.

I saw one tiltup fly a short distance to nab a moth which promptly abandoned the warm stone where it had been sunning itself. The tiltup won the race, and alighting after his short low flight, swallowed his mealy-winged mouthful at a gulp, then glanced all around, and went through a bowing salutation to the four winds, as if thanking each in turn for the kindly service rendered in making the moth's flight difficult. Up went his tail and down his head, then up came his head and his tail dropped, with an uneasy switch at the last. Then he made a little shifting, dancing sidestep, and did it all over again in another direction. This peek-a-boo up and down movement may be, as one writer surmises, a remainder of some tribal signal to show the "follow me" color call when taking flight, but the

manner in which this species does it nowadays seems just an unconscious display of the bird's white "underpants," while salaaming.

All at once Brother's golf ball came sailing over the field, and dropped just inside the bank on my side. It went rolling back down over the short grass and small stones, and clattered right into the happy family party.

"Peet-weet! weet! weet!" they squeaked in alarm, and took to wing. But their fright was over almost before their flight had begun; no doubt they had seen rolling golf balls before, and recognized the intruder almost at once. They sailed in a low, steady curve and came back near the ball, now resting quietly beside a rock near the tiny rivulet trickling along the bottom of the gully.

When Brother appeared on the opposite bank, I pointed out the tableau to him. He laughed to see the five little midgets, on their long pale legs, standing about the ball, saluting it with a deep bow and immediately thereafter insulting it by turning a contemptuous tail on it.

We were still laughing at the droll birds when a friend came up behind me, to learn the cause of our merriment.

"Teetertails, eh?" said he. "Those little beggars have amused me all spring and summer with their antics. My wife says I enjoy them as much as I do my game, and I guess she is right. The pair were here when I first came out in April, running around in the dead grass and feeding at the edge of old decaying snowbanks, like robins in early spring. I got into the habit of looking for them whenever I came down, and missed

them if a day passed without seeing them. Along in May, after the spring rains were over and the warm weather settled, I suspected that nesting was going on somewhere near. For several times I noticed a bird fly up from the gulch down in the pasture, singing a very sweet twittering song, which I suspected of being a courting song, or to entertain a brooding mate. It wasn't a meadowlark, although the flight resembled that bird's; its coloring reminded me of the wood-thrush, although nothing else about it was at all thrush-like. Its legs were much too long and its song too lark-like for a robin. For a while I couldn't place it at all, for I did not then know that a sandpiper has a very song-like courting trill which might entitle him to a place in the class of songsters. Then one day I watched one of them alight, and recognized the teetertail's bobbing and bowing. The next time I heard the song, I studied it, and discovered it to be a cheerful and merry 'peet-weet,' trilled rapidly and long, which made a genuine cadenza of it.

"At last one day I deliberately set out to look for the nest. I followed the gulch down into that pasture, and surprised the mother on her nest about two yards from the water. It was not a pretentious cradle at all, simply a little scoop in the ground, whether natural or made by the bird, I cannot say. But I suspect the latter, as it was in the shelter of a good-sized weed growing near a stone. That location was almost too favorable to be accidental, wasn't it? The cavity was lined with a little fine grass, and there were four spotted creamy eggs in it, all lying with the small ends turned in.

While I looked at the eggs, the mother was not far off, bowing graciously one minute and turning her tail up at me the next, perhaps to distract my attention from the nest.

"After that I often stopped my game, if I was alone, to saunter down and see how the nesting was getting on, and I count it sufficient reward for my friendly interest that I was on hand the morning the fluffy chicks commenced running out of their shells. Rather, three little powder-puffs were sporting about the nest when I arrived, and while I lingered the fourth egg cracked and a wet little bird tumbled out into the world. It lay still for a few minutes, while the sun and wind dried it, but within a quarter of an hour, it had run off to join its brothers and sisters. Since then I've enjoyed seeing the little flock feeding and playing here in the gulch. I suppose that's the four and the father,—the mother is perhaps brooding another clutch of eggs somewhere about. But this time she has to get along without the musical flight, for the father is too busy with the first brood to entertain her.

"I hope they'll learn to like golf so well they will be back next summer, and bring their friends with them. I like a little bird life around the links, and these teeter-tails have been more interesting than some of the humans I've played with. Now watch. Fore!"

He took an extra ball from his pocket, and tossed it down into the gulch, almost hitting one of the sandlarks with the light missile. The bird gave a sidewise hop and a little squeak of fright, then sidled up to the ball and looked it over well, even rolling it a bit with his

beak as if to be certain he was not neglecting a morsel of something good to eat. Then he bobbed the stranger a curtsey, and turning his tail on it for the final salute, bowed again, and went skipping along the gravel in chase of a lively hopper which caught his eye in the edge of the grass.

XXXV

GRACKLE THE BULLY

Once while waiting on a boat-deck at a dock I witnessed an interesting bit of bird life.

Parallel with the dock an abandoned logging trestle runs out on the beach, ending in a long wooden breakwater. The slip thus formed was edged with a jam of floating or partially anchored logs, old and worm-eaten, which furnished a supply of tidbits for the birds that came to feed there.

There were red-winged blackbirds and purple grackles, not in flocks as they gather in the late summer, but singly, as if collecting food for sitting mates or hungry nestlings. Probably the former, as the birds I watched were males in their rich plumage. There were small flocks of a certain timid little bird, much smaller than a house sparrow but with sparrow markings, which I am unable to name; these little birds kept to themselves and mainly up around the trestle-work just beneath the logging track, and so did not take any part in the dispute.

The quarrel we witnessed was a family affair, strictly, between the red-wings and the grackles. A red-wing would be feeding ever so quietly by himself, hopping from one log to another, taking a bit here and

a snatch there, and troubling no one. But if a grackle flew in, red-wing must leave. There was plenty of room for both birds, and plenty of food, too, but the grackle just couldn't let his smaller cousin alone. Perhaps it was the lovely red shoulder-straps which excited his envy, but more likely he just naturally liked to bully because larger, for his purple hackle glistened and shone in the bright sunlight as gorgeously as red-wing's shoulder knots.

At any rate, instead of flying down and feeding quietly by himself, as red-wing was doing, or even sociably with his cousin, as red-wing seemed quite willing to do, grackle would take pains first to get rid of this unwelcome company before starting to forage. He would fly down beside red-wing, sputtering and clucking, and, if the smaller bird didn't immediately clear out, would give him a sharp, hastening peck of his long jetty beak, and sputter out a loud, threatening: "Chuck, chuck!"

I watched a big purple grackle drive a peaceful red-wing from three different logs, following him from one to the other as red-wing alighted at what he evidently considered a safe distance. Not until red-wing, uttering his plaintive "Please, please!" flew away under the trestle and out of sight did the grackle proceed to gather food. This he did with the utmost dignity and sang-froid, walking gravely along a log or board even to the point of wetting his toes, and apparently not at all disturbed by his show of selfishness. He acted much like a crow, we noticed, in the way he strutted about, and took it for granted that "what's mine's mine, and what's

yours's mine, too." To watch him, then, one would never suspect him of spite or malice, for his attitude was most bland.

When his crop was full, he flew away. Presently a red-wing came in, settling down at the shore end of the jam. He was busying himself about the logs, with the seeds and insects he found there, and chattering softly to himself, when a grackle flew in near him and commenced to feed. But as soon as he spied red-wing, he flew over and drove his cousin away, then went back to where he had been feeding and continued harvesting the dainty morsels he evidently considered his rightful property, but which he could not enjoy as long as red-wing was sharing them.

Once two red-wings were trying to get a load of the provender, and a greedy grackle drove them both away, although they were most reluctant to go, and coaxed hard to stay and lingered about even though grackle kept scolding at them and offering violence when they did not move. At another time there were two grackles feeding there, but we noticed that no red-wings flew in while both remained. It was interesting to listen to their bickering, as the grackles would sputter away even while feeding, if a red-wing failed to take the hint soon enough.

It was a new revelation in bird relations. None of us had ever heard that there is any ill-feeling between the two families of blackbirds; indeed, some bird books give instances of their flocking peaceably together. This may have been some local squabble over this particular feeding-ground, but the grackles were evidently quite

serious in their determination to keep it entirely to themselves. They insisted that the red-wings could not poach in their preserves, without being molested, even though the red-wings might get there first, and they policed the place from all such attempts. Do these birds often quarrel thus? I wonder. Or are grackles just naturally pugnacious?

XXXVI

THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE CORPORALS

LEST the foregoing article should give the impression that the red-winged blackbird is a woeful coward, and does not have the courage which should match his glowing epaulettes, I will hasten to clear him of any such suspicions by describing an incident I witnessed this spring.

For this second red-wing episode shows a very different side of his character, and proves that his shoulder-straps are honestly come by, that he is a valorous little chap at heart, and that when it is a case of defending his nesting mate, or his helpless young, he is indifferent to his own safety.

A party of us was motoring along a country road, not far from town, and had reached a short stretch which is thinly wooded on one side with burnt-over pines and second-growth shrubbery, and on the other edged by a small, reedy swamp.

Suddenly, above the hum of the motor, I heard a shrill chirping almost directly overhead, and glancing up, saw a big bird making off toward a tall dead pine a few rods from the road, with a small bird in close pursuit.

The big bird was evidently in a hurry, and the darting flutter of the smaller one showed that he was trying to get in as many stabs with his beak as possible while his enemy was on the run. Shooting ahead and dropping

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

RED-WINGED BLACKBIRD

down on the big bird's head, and then falling back a few flutters, only to dart forward again, the little bird kept up an angry squeaking that did much to hasten his victim.

"Stop!" I shouted to the driver. "Birds!"

And knowing bird-study to be my mania, he applied the emergency brake.

"It's a kingbird chasing a crow!" I explained, while the two were in the air, hastily supposing it to be an instance of that well-known bird antipathy.

The big bird got to his perch on the pine, pursued to the last by his wildly chirping little assailant. But he had no sooner alighted than the small bird gave a parting stab at his head, wheeling as it did so, and made for another dead tree about half-way to the road. And as it was settling there, the sun lighted up a pair of scarlet epaulettes, and we all cried the bird's name, in a gasp of surprise:

"A red-winged blackbird!"

Red-wing dropped to his perch and burst into a triumphant ripple which was not the "O-ka-lee" that Emerson has heard him say, but the "Con-quer-eee-eee-eee!" that Thoreau interprets, the last syllable prolonged into a taunting jeer.

"Hear him brag!" laughed one member of the party.

"And with reason," added the man of the party, "for that's a hawk he's been chasing. Look at him! Too small for a crow, and didn't fly like one, either, and isn't even black, and perches there in a very hawklike attitude. Got your glasses?"

I had them, and the consensus of opinion, after we had

all had a look in turn, satisfied us that it was a pigeon hawk. Then, too, one of the party had read not long before that red-wing is one species the pigeon hawk considers "a bird of his size," and consequently a tidbit often found in his larder. By a strange coincidence, red-wing is often called "the little corporal," while the adult pigeon hawk is as frequently named "the little corporal hawk." So we have decided to name this episode, whenever we refer to it, "The Battle of the Little Corporals."

We watched red-wing finish his song of victory, and fly off to the marsh and alight on a swaying reed some distance away to repeat his triumphant strains. The pigeon hawk sat on his dead pine tip, rather crestfallen, we thought, but occasionally staring over his shoulder as if trying to intimidate his small enemy with a stern expression. But red-wing cared not a whit for the other little corporal's eye, having just seen the tail of his coat as he sped in haste from the vicinity of red-wing's nest. In fact, through the glasses we made out several red-wing nest-bags swinging in the breeze from different reeds, some completed and some not. So we were quite certain that red-wing had cause for his dashing bravery. Perhaps he had several wives to protect and defend, as he is accused of doing.

But pigeon hawk, either ashamed of his former discretion, or having for his motto "Try, try again," soon left his perch and sailed over our heads to a tall stump on the edge of the swamp. There he alighted, and began casting sly looks into red-wing's swamp from over his shoulder.

As long as he perched there red-wing did not molest him, but he had no sooner spread his wings and started to range over the swamp than red-wing ceased shouting his triumph and began squealing a challenge. Pell-mell he came on, like a flame-tipped bullet, in a rising curve that carried him straight toward pigeon hawk. We heard other red-wings singing their shimmering, watery " O-ka-lees " in more distant parts of the swamp, but this one bird seemed to realize keenly the danger of pigeon hawk's presence and would not tolerate it.

And just before red-wing caught up with him pigeon hawk wheeled and came back across the road and sought safety on his dead pine again. Red-wing was close at his heels all the way, and often on his back to give a stabbing thrust at the enemy's crown or eye, whichever could be struck. He dipped so closely toward pigeon hawk as he turned that we fully expected to hear the larger bird yelp with the pain of a prick from his dagger-like beak.

Red-wing then returned to the swamp and began telling all his brother officers and his home-folks the story of this second tilt with the enemy.

My friends were bound for a farmhouse some miles down the road, for supplies already contracted for, so I let them go on without me, and remained to watch this duel.

It was interesting to notice the routine of their methods,—much like a fencing bout. Pigeon hawk seemed to feel safe when perched on his dead pine tree, and would make for it every time his small enemy rushed at him; he was more apprehensive on the stump, feeling

certain that leaving it meant another sally, yet desirous of venturing. Again and again, during the half-hour I watched them, red-wing drove pigeon hawk out of that swamp, and clear to the dead pine, where he always left his victim unmolested and went home to sing a wild burst of victory. Neither was pigeon hawk routed from the stump on the edge of the swamp; but let him leave it, and red-wing was at him with a swiftness of attack that seemed to deprive pigeon hawk of every other weapon except flight, which he always promptly used. If there had not been menace in pigeon hawk's persistent loitering about, and decision in red-wing's defense, it would have seemed like the give and take of some friendly game. But there was an earnestness about it all that was convincing. Red-wing must have been a particularly courageous blackbird, and pigeon hawk an over-timid member of his family, and since one possessed courage and the other size, the affair threatened to become a pitched battle to the death, or even a time-honored feud.

When my friends returned pigeon hawk was resting on his stump, deliberating another flight over the swamp, judging by the way he craned his neck slyly from side to side, and kept an eye all the while on red-wing, who was taunting him to "try it again." And each bird was so engrossed in their duel that they appeared to be unconscious of the presence of interested humans.

"If I had a gun, I'd shoot that hawk," threatened the man of the party, as we drove on.

But from over our shoulders we heard red-wing

shrilling his battle cry, and saw him winging to the attack, and as one member said:

"Let us hope that the smaller little corporal will come off best in the end."

XXXVII

THE HEAVENLY TWINS

I HAD gone into the country for a month's visit. My first morning I was awakened just at dawn by the loud whoop of a robin near to my window. I lay there, listening for the awakening of the birds, one of the most beautiful chorals in all nature. His rousing call several times repeated, robin launched into a mellow but low warble, much as a boy whistles with rounded cheeks and opened throat. But he had just got a good start with his concert when a bluebird, farther away, commenced asking, in that impersonal show of gentle interest which only a bluebird can assume: "Re-al-ly? re-al-ly? re-al-ly?" And then, an instant later, a wren, farther away, burst into his alarm-clock rattle and clatter, as though horribly put out at not being the first to awake, but determined to be the true reveille of the morning, and now that he was up and doing, drown out all competitors for that honor.

The more timid bluebird subsided into an occasional little questioning twitter, or, at least, that was all I could catch of his matin; robin, however, was undaunted, and kept it up at the top of his voice, and for a time the two birds, wren and robin, seemed on the point of cracking their flutes beyond recovery in the effort to outdo each other.

After a quarter of an hour, perhaps, they were still at it in full tone, when a new note joined the duet. It was the call of the mourning dove,—"Coo-loo, coo-loo," a soft, gentle, far-distant, long-drawn wood-wind note, yet most distinct through the loud flute tones of the nearer birds. The call has a peculiarly penetrative power, which I had not thought of before in connection with the dove. It may be the bird has ventriloquistic ability, but I am inclined to think this carrying power is due to the deep register of the bird's voice.

The robin and the wren, furnishing the tenor and the soprano of the choir, filled all the high pitch my ear could accommodate, leaving the low pitch to the alto of the dove. Most birds have such high-keyed voices that the dove shows her wisdom and originality by singing the contralto; and so succeeds in making herself heard. Then, too, while many of the song-birds choose rollicking tunes and rapid hornpipes to express their joy, the mourner rejoices in plaintive, minor recitatives, which is none the less an expression of joy and content.

The melancholy recital is delightful to hear at all times, but when it throbs on and on, as the accompaniment to so much piping and trilling as robin and wren can utter, it loses nothing in the comparison.

For several days thereafter I got glimpses of a mourning dove or two flitting about the willow windbrake along the north edge of the barnyard. To me there is no bird quite so beautiful in the matter of plumage and build. It is not brilliant, and by no means is it dingy. After seeing one of these elegant birds, the tanager and even the bluebird seem too gorgeous for every-day life

while the tousled titmouse and the bunty wren appear slovenly and common. The cedar waxwing most nearly approaches the mourning dove in exquisiteness, but even he is not quite so controlled in his tastes, for although his trim plumage suggests an immaculately tailored individual, his stocky build and waxen spots and yellow stripings hint of "*un nouveau riche*," who, having been to the best tailor he could find, reveals his low-class streak by donning too many rings and gewgaws.

The mourning dove is a gentleman from beak to tail. His build is that of a thoroughbred, slim and graceful, and with all the cloddishness refined out of it by generations of genteel living. His plumage is silky and soft, the very best quality to be had, and of a wonderful fawn-gray, so original in shade that one suspects this gentleman must have ordered a select pattern of his own artistic designing. As further proof of his blue-blood, he wears a gold and ruby jeweled collar, like a badge of honor. He affects jaunty little black burnsides, just in front of and below his ears, most ultra in facial ornamentation. In repose, the tail of his coat is an arrow-head in shape, but when he flies away it broadens into a fan tipped with a white circle, outlined by black spots just within the white, and this glint of white as he disappears is the only bit of marking which seems unnecessary in his whole costume. But, as he likes it, I must be content. He does not, like the tanager, the bluebird, and some gay husbands I could name, take unto himself all the good clothes of the family; for his mate goes just as well-dressed as he, and in the same pattern, even to the

knightly necklace. "My mate deserves as good as I have," he seems to believe.

For two days I followed the coo-looing here and there, feeling contented if I caught now and then a glimpse of one of the beautiful birds. I would spy a mourning dove perched in a tree or on the telephone wire, or stalking over the ground, and turn my glasses on it. But by some sixth sense he seemed to feel those glasses or the eyes behind them, for with a backward glance over his shoulder he would disappear in a soft whir of wings. "As shy and harmless as a dove" is no strained comparison; no doubt the dove would declare his disappearance was proof that upon occasion he can be as "wise as a serpent."

One day Callie, my boy friend, came in all a-grin.

"Want to see a mourner's nest?"

I took just time to run for my glasses and followed him.

The nest was in a pollarded willow down near the barn. There, on one of the flat stubs, was the cradle. It was just on a level with my chin, and so well ventilated that I could almost have counted the eggs had it been hanging up over my head. Madame Mourning Dove is certainly a fresh air fiend, for she builds with the thought of a good ventilation uppermost in her mind, and has windows even in the floor of her nest. She must look with horror on the stuffy nests which bluebirds and swallows and woodpeckers and martins enjoy; indeed, a dove-cote itself would probably meet with her disapproval. A few sticks had been laid about on the flat surface of the stump, and we laughed to dis-

cover among them a couple of chicken-legs,—drumsticks. No doubt the bird had considered these firm white sticks with such knobby ends just a fit, for they lay at right angles to each other and were crossed in a good secure lock. Careless as the dove usually is in building, unless she takes advantage of some deserted thrush nest, this architect was more thoughtful than usual. Perhaps the lay of the site she had chosen was the cause, for the stub was not more than eight inches in diameter.

So she had really constructed a crude sort of rim to the cradle by piling most of the sticks around its edge, much as children build clothes-pin corncribs. Or, perhaps, her success with the two drumsticks had given her a new idea in building, and she had laid the other sticks with that success in mind. A few sticks had been laid around in the middle of the nest, but one of the eggs had rolled into a snug nook between several of them and was resting on the surface of the willow stump.

There were two eggs, as is the universal rule in doves' nests. Since the birds of each brood are mated for life, a third dove in a nest is *de trop* indeed. The eggs were almost perfectly round, being equal-ended and but four-tenths of an inch longer in the end circumference than about the middle. They were of a pearly white, not the clayey white of a hen's egg, but with the clear, rainbow tinted opalescence of a glass egg. Indeed, after looking at them steadily for a moment, one was half mesmerized into the idea that some rajah or oriental king must have playfully dropped two genuine pearls into the nest.

"Look!" whispered Callie. "There she is, in that willow yonder. Now she's gone."

"We'd better go away and slip back when she gets settled on the eggs," I suggested, and we retreated into the windbrake.

Five minutes after we left the spot we saw the mother fly down. She seemed to look at the eggs carefully, "looking for finger-prints," whispered Callie with a chuckle. But finding them untouched, she settled down over them.

Her mate soon flew down beside her, and learned the whole story. He coo-looed encouragingly, and even once or twice, I confess, his murmurs were punctuated by very undovelike, harsh exclamations,—let us hope it was anger at the intruders and not faultfinding with his mate. He crowded so close to her during their conversation that I feared she would be forced off the nest, but she sat tight and even crowded back herself when he pushed her too hard.

After a time Monsieur flew away, but was soon back with food, which looked like a cutworm. He fed her, then with his beak smoothed her crown, and after locking bills in a parting salute, flew off again.

After she had been so comforted and fed Callie and I thought we might venture near once more. We did not slip stealthily through the trees, but went straight ahead, talking as though doves' nests had never entered our heads. We were quite near to the mother, when we heard a gentle burring of wings, and she was off. We walked right on, paying no attention to the nest, and after we were some little way past, stopped. When we

took a peep over our shoulders the mother was settling down on the eggs.

Her mate again comforted and fed her, and nearly crowded her off the nest in his efforts to caress her. As soon as he flew away we walked back.

Before the day was over we had passed that nest a dozen times or more, and at last were delighted to notice, out of a corner of an eye, that the mother was no longer afraid of us. She half arose, and watched us keenly, but she did not leave the stump. The next day we were able to stand beside her and frankly study her, as she sat firmly in her place. Even her mate accepted us, with her endorsement, and would come near, though they modestly forbore their billing and cooing when we were close by.

The mate was a loving little fellow indeed, but the brooding mother took his affection calmly enough. Sometimes he flew around and around her in circles, never minding if she did not seem to notice him. Occasionally she left the nest for a dust bath or for water, which she sipped like a cow drinking, and not with head tilted back, as a hen drinks. But often, toward the last, when the slightest breeze or too much sunshine would have chilled or cooked the life within the eggs, as soon as the mother left the nest the father would slip into her place. Indeed, sometimes we wouldn't have known which bird was which, if it had not been for the father's awkward way of perching over the eggs instead of hovering them closely and lovingly. It seemed impossible for him to cuddle them as the mother did, although he could lend them the warmth of his body for a short time.

The mother did not suffer by her long hours of brooding; her mate kept her literally stuffed with food, and she grew stout rather than gaunt. Instead of becoming hollow-eyed and thin she was almost double-chinned and pop-eyed from over-eating and lack of exercise, before the eggs were hatched.

Their habit of dust-bathing amused us, for like chickens, the doves would go right past water to enjoy a bath of fine dirt, and would plume and prink for an hour afterward, getting every feather in place. Madame Mourning Dove would have her bath, then prink and plume while she sat brooding; Monsieur did his dressing in the willow near by.

Monsieur kept up his cooing, morning, noon and night, and occasionally he would surprise us by dropping into a harsh, nasal tone of voice. Why he did it, we couldn't imagine, for he never seemed angry with his mate, even though she spent a whole hour at her dust bath.

At the end of seventeen days two little naked birds winked and blinked at us from the willow stump. Not a sign or a shell was to be seen anywhere; either the parents had carried them far away, or had eaten them for safe keeping. Wild birds, as a rule, are very careful that there shall be no litter about to betray the location of the nest, particularly if the young are helpless for a time, or are ground-hatched.

The feeding was a most interesting process. "Pigeon's milk" dates back to the days of fable and legend, and that their especial sort of food is very necessary to the young pigeons is shown by the fact that a dovekin, like many other young animals, will surely die if deprived

of its parents the first week of its life. Artificial feeding will not serve. They must have the peculiar milky fluid which the parents give them; nothing else will do. Scientists state that during the breeding season, the thin walls of the parent birds' crops become thick and enlarged, and secrete a sort of milky substance which soon forms a white curd; this is mixed with the food the parents swallow, and is then regurgitated for the young. Each parent would stand over a nestling, insert its beak into the youngster's mouth, and literally pump it full of the milky fluid. As the nestlings were fed many times a day on this rich food, it was no surprise to see how rapidly they grew.

"Glad I ain't a pigeon," Callie often observed, while watching this feeding, which was most forcibly done. Sometimes it seemed as though the parent would shake the nestling off the stump while pumping it full.

When, after a few days, the feathers began to come through, they were of the family fawn-gray, but the jeweled collars were lacking. Such insignia is not usually bestowed upon a nestling in any bird family; it must be won as well as inherited.

While they were still dressed in their plain fawn color, and had the dumpy dimples of infancy, they began to get restless. They would clamber out on other pollarded branches, or even on limbs near by. They were always together, however; doves are born twins, and like all such pairs, keep up a blended individuality all their lifetime. They look just alike, do the same things, and are always together.

Eventually the young were living in the trees all about

the locality, their parents with them, foraging for them, even feeding them milk at times. The last time we saw the family, to know them, the young were still round and dumpy, and lacking the parental elegance of form. But they were just commencing to don their jeweled collars, and we knew that in time they would be the living, speaking images of their parents.

XXXVIII

A FAITHFUL MATE

A PAIR of bluebirds once built their nest in a clothes-pin-bag in my neighbor's back yard. The cradle was not finished when the woman of the house discovered it on a wash-day morning, so she carefully lifted out the loose mass of sticks and put it in a mountain-ash tree near by. The birds chirped about, scolding her roundly, but she used her clothes-pins, notwithstanding. In the afternoon she hung the bag of pins back on the clothes-line-post, and forgot all about the birds.

The next day she noticed the bluebirds working about the clothes-pin-bag, and peeping in, saw the almost completed nest. Then she thought if they wanted that building site so badly she would give in to them, so she bought a new set of pins and left the birds to nest in peace.

They were very tame from the first, flying fearlessly about as they pleased no matter who was by. They didn't mind us in the least, as we hovered about, watching them. The day after the nest was lined, which was mainly with string gathered about the yard, the first pale-blue egg was laid. During the next four days a new egg was added each morning. The birds did not

always stay about; sometimes they would be gone for an hour or two, though they spent most of the time in our trees.

But at the end of the fifth day Mother Bluebird returned after her morning feed and exercise, and brooded all day. The mate was never far away all the time the brooding lasted, but stood on silent guard, or chirped sociably, or sang his tender little song from the mountain-ash or even on top of the clothes-post. He was much more talkative than she, we noticed. Sometimes her tiny blue-brown head craned from the slit in the bag, but most of the time she kept out of sight, even carrying on her conversations behind closed curtains. Often, we would catch him feeding her, just as though she were a young bird. Several times each day he took her place while she flew off. But he never hovered the eggs quite so closely as she; there was always a bit of his head peeping out of the doorway, and his bright eyes on the watch for her return.

Enemies were made most uncomfortable. The house-cat early learned to keep away from that part of the yard. A squirrel ran up the post one day, but when Father Bluebird flew at him he was almost too frightened to run down again, and was well pecked and punished before he could get away. The location of the nest prevented their being annoyed by house sparrows, those ancient enemies of the bluebird race, as there was no porch in front of the bag, and sparrows do not fly directly into a small opening, but must first alight on a perch and then creep in. If one alighted on the post, Father Bluebird pounced on him with the ferocity of a

kingbird, rather, with more antagonism than I ever saw a kingbird manifest to these Arabs of birddom.

Just two weeks from the day Mother Bluebird commenced brooding we noticed an unusual flurry about the nest. Both birds were coming and going, and from inside came new, weak twitterings. There were two birds fresh from the egg when we first peered in, and later in the day two more came out. The mother brooded the birds most of the day, but twice left the nest to carry away shells. The next morning the fifth egg was hatched.

At first the young were clad in dingy down, but soon the blue began to show in spots, and the gray to darken, until they were a peculiar marbled mixture of the two colors. After about twelve days, three out of the five began to show more blue than the other two, and we decided they were the brothers of the family. Even when the feathers were well out the down stuck through in places, particularly over the eyes.

They would always greet the incoming parent with a squeal for food, but whenever one of us humans peered in upon them we were hissed off very emphatically.

Before all the nestlings were fully feathered, Mother Bluebird's wing became hurt in some way. We did all we could for her and she seemed to appreciate it by letting us bathe and salve it, never trying to escape our hands. But it did not heal right, and her flight was very awkward and slow. Then Father Bluebird took most of the care of the five babies, being almost constantly on the wing. We helped him with contributions of boiled-egg moistened slightly, and so the nestlings

grew as fat and dimpled as babies should be. Mother Bluebird looked after the sanitation of the nest, and everything was kept spotless about the cradle, in spite of her affliction.

Finally one morning a birdling was perched on the edge of the doorway, looking ship-shape for his voyage into the world. He gazed about some time, occasionally answering Mother Bluebird's anxious chirps from the post overhead, but often wilfully neglecting to reply, so interested did he appear in everything about him. Father Bluebird flew in with a grasshopper, and after learning all about the matter, he flew to the mountain-ash fifteen feet away, and called. But his son was reluctant to leave the nest, and did not move.

All at once a little mottled head peered up from the nest, behind Brother Bluebird, and one of the little sisters added her cheeping encouragement. Either she said something that aroused his spunk, or even went so far as to push him a bit, for Brother Bluebird teetered, squeaked with fright, spread his wings, and wildly fluttered over to the lowest branch of the ash. As soon as he left the bag, his father flew to meet him, and escorted him all the way with loud applause.

Sister Bluebird took her brother's place on the door-sill, and with but little time spent in preparation, gave a chirp as much as to say, "Now watch me, everybody," and sailed up to a still higher branch on the ash. No doubt she is one of those advanced females, and will rule the roost when she settles into a home of her own.

By evening the parents had their whole brood in the ash, three of them perched together on one branch,

crowded as closely to each other and to the trunk as they could get. The father slept on another limb with one child pressed between him and the trunk, while lower down was Mother Bluebird and a fifth nestling.

For days the family remained in the yard, occupying one tree after another, the father foraging for them, the mother helping all she could. Then we missed the birds and thought they had left us to join the flocks that were to be seen in our drives about the country; we would see a crowd of sparrow-like birds in trees and on fences, but as they took flight a bluish sheen would glance from their wings, showing that many of them were young male bluebirds in their first plumage.

But in September the parent birds came back; we recognized them by the maimed wing of the female and the tender devotion of the male. And once, too, we saw them revisiting the clothes-pin-bag, taking turns disappearing therein as if remembering the happy days they had spent there.

Even when the other birds had migrated, and the snow had come, the pair did not leave. Mother Bluebird's wing was too crippled for the long journey, no doubt, and her faithful mate would not leave her. They had got their children off with the south-bound flocks, and had come to us for the winter.

They housed themselves in the barn, and lived royally on our mountain-ash berries and crumbs and suet.

We were awaiting with interest the spring nesting, hoping the pair would reoccupy the clothes-pin-bag. But one February day Tommy saw a stray cat running out from the evergreen thicket with a bird in its mouth, and

a wildly chirping bluebird in close pursuit, almost frantic with alarm and grief. Tommy gave chase, and succeeded in rescuing the captive.

It was Mother Bluebird, quite dead. Tommy buried her deep in the snow, while her mate perched on a tree and mourned. A day or two after we missed him, and never saw him again, at least to recognize him.

XXXIX

LADY BALTIMORE'S CASTLE

Lord Baltimore arrived in our yard on the tenth of May, and with a clear, loud whistle of "See me! See me!" summoned the whole family from the breakfast table to welcome him.

All that day he hung about the trees in the front yard, making them ring with his stirring martial strains of self-appraisement, or hushing them to a soft silence with his lovely, querulous, coaxing, marital pleasings. Sometimes, too, his tones took on a cheery, joyful, exuberant character, as if the hope was mounting high within him that his lady would soon appear. And so restless was he that he kept the trees twinkling as he flashed in and out the branches like a mammoth lightning-bug.

The next day he disappeared, but on the third day was back again, with his fair lady, whom he followed all about the yard, wooing with a beautiful, pathetic serenade. She was olivaceous of coat where he was jetty, and yellow-vested in place of his brilliant orange, and perhaps it was her demureness, and her indifference, rather than physical beauty, which won him.

At any rate he was an ardent lover, and a faithful mate, and where she was seen he was always in close attendance. Sometimes they disappeared for hours, and even days, and we feared Lady Baltimore had dis-

approved of our trees and gone elsewhere to nest. For in spite of his vigorous manliness of character it was evident that in his mate he had met his match. No matter how much he paraded before her, she seemed to have the idea that to choose too soon would be to "drive her ducks to a poor market." So she kept him dangling and anxious. She was a coy bunch of feathers.

But on May nineteenth one member of the family rushed in reporting with delight that Lord and Lady Baltimore were back and were at work on a mansion in the weeping willow near the garden fence. There was an elm in the front yard which Lord Baltimore had seemed to prefer when Lady Baltimore had first appeared, and he even went there and called to her at times. Usually she worked steadily on without listening, but at times his masculine insistence tempted her to join him in the elm, though she never remained long. So, since Lady Baltimore would have the willow, her mate reasonably gave in and worked with her in the construction of the cradle which was to swing from a drooping branch.

It was hung beneath a canopy of leaves and commenced with a loose piece of red wrapping cord, from no one knew where. This was slung between two branches, letting it hang slack and forming a loop about seven inches long. When the nest was abandoned we got a boy to cut it down for us, and were delighted to trace this line of red down along the inside of the bag and up the other side. Probably Lady Baltimore's love of color caused her to retrieve the scarlet twine, but her caution instructed her to keep it on the inside where it would not betray the nest so readily. Though, for that matter,

this open-air hammock was in plain sight all summer, so might have been made entirely of red without being much more conspicuous.

Each end of the red cord was firmly twisted about several small twigs, anchoring it firmly, though the completed nest had the appearance of barely touching the twigs at all.

This foundation cord, with several others of white, formed the skeleton of the nest, which was sided with leaves, grass-blades, and straws, and one or two bits of cloth, deftly laced in and out or bound into place with strings, threads, fibres of plant-stalks, and horsehair.

We watched the birds at work for hours, through the glasses, and yet found it difficult to see just how the work was done. Sometimes both would be working at it, leaning out from the branches or twigs above, or hanging to the nest itself. Sometimes the male would work alone, and sometimes the female alone, while the other searched for suitable materials. While working Lady Baltimore often warbled away softly, as if humming to herself, and this she did even while weaving threads in and out with her beak. This reminded one of a human mother humming to herself about a cradle. It was the only time we ever heard her try to sing, and though it was not at all like her mate's public performances, it was very creditable, because it was a little ripple of motherly love coming straight from the heart.

Lord Baltimore, man-like, took this work seriously, and was always silent while he wove. Sometimes, when his happiness overcame him completely, and he must sing, he would quit his work, mount to the top of the

tree, or to another one, even going so far as his favorite elm. There he would fife his shrill "Dearie, dearie, dearie," for all the world to hear. If a peremptory note sometimes crept in, Lady Baltimore paid no attention, and went on with her appointed task. She knew her work, and didn't need to be advised as to how to do it.

Truly, the female bird should wear soft colors, since she is the anchor which holds the gayer member of the family in check.

It took them nine days to make and line the cradle, so when it was finished there was no question as to its strength and durability. Not, however, that they worked regular hours and daily. Sometimes they would be gone for several hours, usually in the noon-time warmth. One rainy day they did not work at all.

We longed to have a peep into it, but it was slung too far out for us to venture on the limb, and up too high to be reached with a ladder. So we had to wait for a glimpse of that soft bed of lint, hair and shreds of vine-bark, until we could hold it in the hand. But from an upper window we could look across at the nest, so that while we could not see what went on within its depths, we could watch much that happened at the top of the castle.

We soon learned to distinguish Lord Baltimore's morning song from that of the other birds about. For at dawn he could be seen in his elm, head lifted high and throat throbbing, while he trilled a tender aubade to the mate on the nest. During the day he sometimes sang from there a melody full of cheeriness and good-fellow-

ship. And often, when the day was warm, he summoned his lady from her brooding for a flight abroad.

During the brooding period he did not relax in gallantry, but continued to bow and scrape to her whenever near her, accompanying his salaams to the rhythm of his elaborate melodic poem.

And he often visited her in the willow tree, where he kept up a spirited twitter, to which she seldom troubled to reply. Every morning he held a song recital for her benefit, from sunrise to ten, now running high, and loud, with joyful exultant love, then crooning with low, soft cadence, vibrating with caressing tenderness, rounded off with a note of entreaty, yet musical withal. It is a shriller and louder performance than the robin's, yet softer and more modulated than Jimmy Wren's war-whoop.

We were not certain how many eggs were laid. But it was a week between finishing the nest and the commencement of brooding. For two weeks the mother sheltered the eggs, then one morning when both parents were hovering over the pocket, gazing into its depths, we suspected a new-born Earl Baltimore.

And soon we had proof of his arrival, for a young oriole is the crybaby of birddom, as others have remarked. Before he can be seen he can be heard, uttering a plaintive and constant "chur-r-r-r-r." Perhaps it is because he cannot see out that he is so discontented. Perhaps that is why he soon crawls to the top.

For about three days after the first Earl arrived he had clambered to the edge of the nest and was fed there by the parents. He would disappear and reappear at

will evidently, and though the parents cautioned him frequently to be careful, they did not seem to be unduly alarmed over his venturesome habit.

Soon other fledglings were to be seen at the edge of the pocket, and creeping out of it to sway and sun and stretch a while on the home branch. And of course to wail for food.

Before they were a week old, pin-feathers began to darken their down, and in two weeks the nestlings were fully fledged, except for wisps of down through the feathers. They wore their mother's neutral colors. By that time they were wandering about the tree, stealing along after the parents, as silent and furtive as though in hiding.

There were four of them, and they kept their parents so busy that Lord Baltimore forgot to sing. But my father declared Lord Baltimore was at last making himself useful as well as ornamental, by gathering potato bugs for the family larder. The willow tree was near the garden, which probably accounted for the way the children remained there for days, rather than roaming about the other trees. It was a short flight from the potatoes to the babies, and so the parents did not urge their children to leave the home tree while their tummies were in such a dissatisfied condition.

One day Father called us to see a comical sight,—the whole four young orioles were lined up on the garden fence, and being fed potato bugs as fast as the parents could collect them. For the first few days in the nest we noticed the parents fed their young by regurgitation, but that manner of administering nourishment soon

changed when the young were able to reach for their food. And though they perched quite contentedly on the fence, waiting for a bug, there was no delay in snatching it when it was brought within reach.

We were sorry when the family decided to wander to new fields, Father particularly, for there was still a plentiful crop of potato bugs threatening to ruin his potato yield, unless he got busy and did the work of the birds.

Late in August, a male oriole spent nearly the whole day loitering about the elm tree. We chose to think it was Lord Baltimore himself, back for a farewell visit to his favorite roosting place while the nesting was in progress, and where he would have located the nest, had he been permitted to choose.

XL

A MERRY GAME

One bright Sunday afternoon in June I was out on the lawn reading, when my attention was attracted by a beautiful bird song somewhere out in the back yard. I did not recognize the singer, and at once set out to locate him. I stopped beneath an apple tree near the barn and listened. The liquid, bubbling melody broke out from the vicinity of the barn, and soon I spied a tiny wren standing on the porch at the entrance to a little bird-house my brother had placed high on the gable end of the building. His head was uplifted, and he was warbling the sweetest, tenderest gurgling trill that bubbled up from his throat like water from a spring. Then he ceased for a moment, gave two or three quick chirps, then sang again.

The second time he stopped and called, a soft echo of his chirps came from the apple tree over my head. I looked just in time to see a tiny brown body flying out from the branches above and toward a plum tree that stands at one point of a triangle roughly completed by the barn and the apple tree. She flew softly and stealthily, and seemed to creep out of sight in the foliage. Before she was fairly out of sight among the plum leaves there was a flutter of wings in the branches above my head, and then the gurgling song with its sweet trills broke out in the apple tree.

I glanced toward the bird-house on the barn, no wren was there; he had flown to the apple tree in obedience to that soft call, and now found himself alone there.

He sang and called, and was presently rewarded by a faint chirp from the plum tree. Immediately he was off; but my view not being hindered by leaves, as was his, I saw that while he was on his way to the tree his mate was already flying down to the chicken-fence which stretches from the plum tree to the barn. She crept stealthily into some raspberry bushes which lean against the fence, and it was not until her mate had sung and called many times that she chose to reply with a faint, but encouraging peep.

His ear for direction was good, for there was a little ventriloquism in this peep which would not have guided my ear had I not known where she was. But at once Jimmy Wren was off, singing as he went as though calling "One, two, three! Look out for me!" He halted on a post almost over the place where Mrs. Wren had disappeared among the raspberry leaves, and wooed her with a charming song, punctuated by impatient calls of "Where are you?" which were greeted with absolute silence by Jenny.

And then it was that I witnessed a most unique performance. On the top of that post the little bird lover executed a whirling-dervish sort of waltz, spinning round and round with wings open and fluttering rapidly, his tail raised high, and all the while keeping up a loud, monotonous chirping as he spun, as if humming to himself.

When he finally stopped I expected to see him tumble

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

HOUSE WREN

to the ground in a fit of dizziness. But no, he composed his wings, dropped his tail, and commenced to trill his grand-opera-tenor cadenza. He called, waltzed, sang, chirped, until such time as a far-away call came to him from the depths of the raspberry bushes. With a shrill, triumphant whoop of joy he disappeared among the bushes, but too late, for by that time his mate had dodged out of the bushes and flying rapidly over to the apple tree, was perched quietly over my head. I could almost fancy her laughing to herself over the neat way she had evaded him that time.

So they kept it up for the hour or so that I watched. They appeared to be unconscious of my presence, flying fearlessly a few feet over or beside me; their game occupied their entire attention. To the barn, to the apple tree, to the raspberry bushes, to the plum tree, to the bird-house, to the barn gable, to the fence, to the apple tree, again and again they flew, with occasional flights by Jenny to a golden willow beside the barn. Sometimes Jimmy would discover his mate's flight, swerve from his course, and arrive at her destination as soon as she. Then off she would go pell-mell, he in full pursuit, and the game would proceed gaily for a few moments, mainly in the air. Sometimes, when the two birds would be on the same branch, momentarily, the "seeker" seemed to give the "hider" a new chance, for off she would go while he remained behind to sing a few lines. When she was well hidden, he would stop singing and call, and as soon as she answered he would be off in search of her. Whenever he was kept waiting too long, he would perform his odd waltz on the peak of the barn

or on a fence-post, going round and round all the while he droned. I finally grew weary of standing and went back to my book, but the singing and chirping continued until late in the evening.

XLI

A HAPPY HUNTING GROUND

One summer evening I was waiting for a street car on a quiet corner; the arc light was enveloped with a haze of tiny insects that danced about its fascinating glow, and from occasional painful punctures on hands or face I had no difficulty in classifying at least some of them.

All at once, a shadowy pair of dark wings swooped into the circle of light; they darted with owl-like ease and softness once around the globe, and then glided off into the darkness on the other side of the street. After a short interval they noiselessly reappeared, circled the light once more, and departed as before. This time I heard a soft buzzing or humming, like the drone of a fly in a web or a bluebottle against a sunny window-pane, as the bird swept through the air.

I wondered what sort of a bird it might be, and had about decided on some small owl, when, during his second absence, I heard a "whip-poor-will" from the maple opposite, yet close enough so I could distinguish that "cluck" with which the bird invariably closes his cry,—as though he has been cut short by a hiccough.

He repeated the call several times in rapid succession,—"Whip-poor-will (cluck)—whip-poor-will (cluck)

—whip-poor-will (cluck)!" with a rising inflection as if calling upon some mate or companion to join him in his feast. But he could not waste too much time calling, with food in plenty to be had for the gathering, and soon he whisked into sight once more. This time I distinguished his wide-open beak, like an empty purse yawning for money, and the white edging of his tail feathers as he flashed out of sight across the street.

I was now thoroughly interested in the bird's performance, and letting my car go on without me, sat down on the curbing to watch the bird. I timed his flights by my watch, and found that in five minutes he had encircled the light just seven times, and that it took him about forty seconds to make the round trip from the lamp to his tree. This was the time he took to circle about the light once, with a few, fluttering side-flights to gather in what fleeing food he could catch without pausing or turning back, go off to his perch, swallow his prey, call his mate, and come back. For although the insects always scattered to all sides when the bird dashed in upon them, before he was through with his music the swarm had reassembled and were dancing about as gaily as though winged death was a thing they had never dreamed of. They couldn't leave that beautiful flame, no matter what it might cost them to remain.

"Now I wonder," I queried of myself, "does he go to his perch to let the gnats collect again, and call to occupy the time of waiting, or does he go to his vantage post to call, knowing that the insects will continue to gather as long as he cares to feed?"

It seemed hopeless to attempt to solve this problem

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

in bird reasoning, but presently, for all that, it solved itself, at least to my satisfaction. For while the winged dreadnaught was making one of its circling raids, there came a "whip-poor-will" from the darkness near by which sent it hurrying off in that direction as rapidly as possible, without delaying to make any side-sallies.

After a short silence, when, or so it seemed, the birds arranged their plan of campaign, the flights recommenced, but much more frequently. Indeed I soon ascertained that there was a bird circling the light about every fifteen seconds; that there was no time now spent in calling, and that the swarm would no sooner be collected about the light after one of their deadly swoops, than a bird would come volplaning into their midst with wide-opened mouth. Watching them closely I discovered that there now were two birds engaged in the raiding; they had taken up their lookout perch on a tall light pole near the maple tree, and were taking turns flying into the swarm. One would perch there while its mate flew around, as its mate was on the homeward stretch it would start away from the post and be on its way to the light while the insects were reassembling. In this way no time was lost, and for the ten minutes I timed them the two birds had encircled the light just thirty-nine times.

So intent were they upon what they were doing that I walked over and took up my stand almost under the pole, yet they flew back and forth quite fearlessly. One of the birds, I noticed, was a female, lacking the white tail-edging, so I decided that Mr. William had arrived on the scene first and had been so anxious to share his

plenty with his mate that he had kept calling until she came. As they flew past, almost over my head, the low humming sound they made was very pleasant to hear, as though they were murmuring to themselves in great satisfaction over their hunting-grounds.

I left them still playing their relay flight, feeling sure they could continue it until daylight if the supply of insects held out, so untiring were their weird, ghostly wings. To watch them so busily flying back and forth, and knowing almost to a certainty that their main food was mosquitoes, I was impressed with the fact that all bald-headed men who love suburban and rural spots, and thin-skinned people who cannot endure the odor of mosquito "dope" should be very friendly to the whip-poor-will and other night-feeding birds.

XLII

NUTHATCH IN TOWN

One day last summer I happened to glance from my window at a fortunate moment. Across the street are three Lombardy poplars, cruelly trimmed to tall bean-poles with brushy tops, but affording an unobstructed view of the trunks for almost two-thirds of the way up.

In one of the trees I caught a glimpse of a gray-coated, black-capped, white-throated, stub-tailed bird which I recognized at once for the white breasted nuthatch. Both his garb and his manner betrayed his identity.

He was creeping down the tree, head-first, as no sparrow could do. He was feeding in his own peculiar way, darting down a few steps, pausing, hitching across, starting back up the tree, flying a half-dozen wing-beats or so close to the bark, as though skimming it, and alighting in a new place and starting down again.

He seemed to have no plan about clearing that tree of vermin, except generally downward, but was taking whatever he could find wherever it was to be found.

The little " tree-mouse " went over trunk and branches alike, in a stealthy but restless sort of way, disappearing around a branch or behind the trunk soon to reappear and perform his curious acrobatics in plain

view of the street. The knowledge that he had a pair of capable wings ready to use, and that his claws were perfect climbers, made him fearless, and he danced along on the under side of a branch or tobogganed head first down the upright trunk as easily as a fly on a ceiling or window-pane.

The little upside down bird was interesting, both for his own odd ways and because, although usually considered a retiring wood bird, that prefers flocks of his own kind and the society of chickadees and creepers and woodpeckers to that of mankind, here he was, all alone in a city street. He had evidently slipped away from his home in some outlying park or suburban grove, to spend an hour cleaning my neighbor's Lombardy poplars.

I took my glasses and a few peanuts that happened to be handy, and went across the street to observe him at close range. I stopped perhaps a dozen feet from the tree, and turned my glasses up at him.

"Quah, quah, quah!" I could both see and hear him saying to himself, as he went on with his work. "Let her watch. I don't care!" And he gave a more nasal "Yank, yank, yank!" and pulled out a grub his prying beak had discovered.

It was interesting to watch him at his grubbing. He would run a few steps with his head up like a squirrel's, showing his gleaming silver throat. Then he would stoop, lower his ear to listen, then thrust his long, strong pickax beak into the bark. And seldom did he bring it out without making a motion that looked like the smack of his lips over something good he had found there, and

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

NUTHATCHES

a throb of his white throat that was surely swallowing some tidbit.

He gradually worked down the tree to the base of the trunk, and then flew to the top of the adjoining poplar and started his official inspection once more.

Wondering if he would like my peanuts, I tossed one, which dropped in a depression of an exposed root just at the base of the tree.

When white breast came to the nut, his surprise was evident. He looked it over, first on one side and then on the other, even seemed to smell of it, and to cock his ear to listen for a rustling grub within this queer cocoon.

But he was a wise little bird, and found it too tempting to leave. No doubt he heard the nuts rattling invitingly within as he stirred it with his inquisitive beak.

He seized the nut at last, wedged it tightly into a big crack in the bark, hacked it open with several quick, swinging blows of his strong beak. He seemed to enjoy the peanut meat as much as larvæ steaks, for he ate both peas and even flew down to the grass for a bit he lost. He did not eat the rescued morsel where he found it, but flew into the tree with it.

From there he went over into the top of the third poplar, and commenced feeding down. I tossed a nut at the foot of this tree, and it was awaiting him when he got to the bottom. He ate this second nut, too, and then I was astonished to see him show what looked like reason. For he deliberately flew back to the first tree, and alighted about half-way down the trunk. He quickly ran down the tree a few steps at a time, stopping head up to listen, and was soon at the base of the tree.

Here he actually searched about the bark and roots, and even in the grass, as if thinking this tree might grow those delicious odd nuts, too.

Not to disappoint him, I tossed him another peanut. But it fell short of the tree, and only frightened him. He flew away down the street, and out of sight.

Although I welcomed white breast to the city, and tried to make his stay pleasant, I am not sure he associated those peanuts with human hospitality. Or perhaps he did not care to be bombarded with them, and thought it better to forego the delicacy rather than run any risks.

At least, I have often looked for him since, but have never caught sight of him as yet.

XLIII

QUEER TRAVELING COMPANIONS

"COME out at once, if you want to see something interesting," a suburban friend telephoned me one late October morning. "Take the next car, if possible, for you mustn't miss it. Birds!—and queer!" she added, with a tantalizing laugh, and hung up.

When I arrived she met me at the gate, field-glasses in hand. She led me mysteriously to the brook just behind the house, and bade me point the glasses into the trees.

"What do you make of that?" she asked, while I studied the birds that were perching or flitting about there.

"Those larger ones are flickers, of course," I decided. "But what are the others? Rusty brown coat, tortoise-shelled in black scallops, similar vest thickly polka-dotted in black, two long black scratches like soot smudges from the corner of the eyes, a bird about ten or eleven inches long, and with a hawk bill? I must see my Key?"

"Don't bother," she triumphed. "I've already found out. They are sparrow hawks. I would have known them sooner, but their being with the flickers misled me. They have been here by the dozens like this all morning, flickers and sparrow hawks together, as companionable as so many blackbirds. But did you ever

know that the two kinds flock together during the migrating season? I didn't."

Neither did I; and later when we searched our bird books through, we found no mention of this very evident fact, — that flickers and sparrow hawks join forces when traveling, at least for the fall migration. For here were the two birds, a dozen and more of each, flying about the trees and fraternizing with the greatest freedom and delight.

"A-wick-a! A-wick-a!" the flickers would call, and "Killy-killy" the sparrow hawks would reply, as friendly as though their words had not been at all suggestive of "Oh, wicked! wicked!" and "Kill-you, kill-you!"

But why should they not flock together, we decided, since sparrow hawk is fond of nesting in a high hole's abandoned dugout, and flicker is big enough to hold his own against this smallest member of the falcon family?

We were interested in observing their widely different manner of eating, and this one trait made it easy to distinguish the two species, even without their difference in size and coloring. Both were dining in a small field adjoining the grove, where food seemed plentiful. The sparrow hawks would dart out from the trees and hover almost motionless in the air, except for the rapidly beating wings and tail, ready to pounce down upon whatever food came to mouth, be it field-mouse or grasshopper. Whenever one arose from the ground, it would make for a tree and there perch quietly while feeding. While the sparrow hawks darted from the trees and down to the ground, or hovered in the air scanning the

ground, the flickers were feeding on the ant-hills like so many chickens hunting for worms. Or, instead of perching in the trees, they kept patrolling the trunks and branches for the insects and larvæ to be found there.

"Notice that the house sparrows are lying low today, and waiting for this horde of barbarians to pass," observed my friend. "I'll wager they are literally shaking in their boots, under the eaves or somewhere out of sight, for not a one is to be seen."

They were conspicuous by their absence all the morning. But one foolhardy house sparrow finally ventured out, and paid dearly for his recklessness. He must have thought the mice and crickets and grasshoppers of the field would so surpass sparrow meat as to make himself immune from danger. But he must have been a very young, inexperienced house sparrow, or one so old that his wits were wool-gathering; for he either had never known, or had forgotten, what keen sight a sparrow hawk has and how it got its name.

And when he did learn it was too late, for all at once we saw the frightened sparrow dash into the currant bushes near by, followed by a red-brown bolt of lightning. Without slackening his speed the sparrow hawk went through the bush and out at the other side, and flew up into a tree to enjoy the feathered tidbit dangling from his beak.

During the day we watched the two strange traveling companions feeding and resting and fraternizing in the grove and field, good friends, yet each respecting the other's peculiar habits and desires.

Finally, late in the afternoon, they foregathered in

the trees, and chattered and called and perched together for some moments. They must have been arranging some routes and plans, for after a bit, with one accord, they all rose in the air and made off, and we saw them no more. As other observers have since told me of seeing the two birds together in flocks about town that day, we decided we had witnessed part of a general migration of flickers and sparrow hawks from, or through, our locality.

XLIV

THE HIGH-HOLDER AGROUND

Though a bird of the woods in every sense of the word, the flicker often leaves his high-holdings and spends some time aground. It is more than the desire to prove he can, for he always has some utilitarian purpose in so doing.

In our motor rides about the country, particularly in August and early fall, I have noticed that often, usually as late in the day as sunset or thereabouts, we would frighten up a flicker from the dusty road. It is easy to identify the species, as one who has once learned the flicker's peculiar colors, markings and flight, will recognize him anywhere, even in the most unexpected places.

"Tell me," I asked a surveyor I know, who is all-wise in bird-lore, "what are they doing there in the dust?"

"Taking a bath, just like any barnyard hen, though not in the same manner," was the answer. "You should watch one at it, for it is an odd sight. Flicker squats flat on his breast, completely hiding his feet or any other means of locomotion, and then glides rapidly and smoothly along in the road, as if drawn by an invisible cable. He reminds me of a snow-plow, for he not only moves like one, but raises the dust in puffs before him

and to each side just as a rotary plow sends the snow showering.

"An old hen wallows from side to side while dust-bathing, like a ship in a trough, and remains in the same place for all her flappings. But flicker goes steadily ahead, plowing his way through the dust while showering himself from stem to stern. When his feathers are full of the cleansing powder, he flies to some convenient perch and shakes himself well, and then preens every feather until it shines.

"I've watched more than one flicker at the trick, and it is surely an odd whim that such a tree-lover should so enjoy a plunge into some dusty road.

"But after all, high-holder is not such a stranger to the earth as one would suppose. Among his thirty-six common names will be found that of 'woodpecker lark,' which, like most of this three dozen others, refers to some certain peculiarity. For he has more whimseys than any dozen other birds. The nickname of 'woodpecker lark' has special reference to his habit of spending a part of each summer rusticating in the fields, in a most larky manner. You know the meadowlark's way of wading along in the grass and stopping every now and then to crane his neck up for a look about. The flicker has that same trick.

"It is usually along in August that the flicker deserts his tree-top castle, or dungeon rather, to take a pilgrimage to some patch of cultivated land, to enjoy the hunting to be found there. And he spends his waking hours merrily chasing crickets, pursuing many down a lane that has no returning. Afoot, as a-wing, he is always

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

FLICKER

in a hurry, and goes hopping along on his short legs as if he had a contract to rid the country of so many million crickets before the autumn struck them low.

"And he is a special foe to ants. Give him a big ant-hill, and he'll not ask for clover. I've been walking through a field before now, and flushed a flicker from the ground. When I found the place where he rose up, it would be an ant-hill, more or less disrupted by the bird's busy feet and beak.

"I saw a funny sight once. A full-grown flicker was trying to teach a half-grown one to scratch for ants. She would scratch away herself, and cackle encouragingly to the youngster, much like an old hen with one chick. The lazy little fellow could see no need of scratching for himself when it was being done so energetically and successfully by his mother, and preferred to stand by and dart in to gobble down the tidbits she stirred up. But the mother was too wise for him, and when she saw he had no intention of digging for food as long as she let him feed on what she found, she tried the plan of eating all she turned out. After she had gobbled down several ants right before the youngster's eager nose, he learned his lesson and went to work himself.

"Young flickers learn to like the taste of ants while they are still nestlings, being fed on such food every half-hour or so by regurgitation. While they are still scrambling about the home trees, they occasionally catch a bit of food for themselves,—some unwary insect that is inspecting the trunk. But as soon as they are able to make the journey, they are taken to some pasture or clearing and taught to scratch for these spicy tidbits.

They soon get to be good foragers, and will turn over bits of wood, leaves, pebbles and chips, to get the tender morsels hiding beneath.

"My observation has been that wherever one sees a flicker, one sees a rollicking bit of bird life apt to do almost anything unusual. Never be surprised at anything you find him doing, for he is a regular clown among birds. A genius, too, most unaccountable and erratic, yet sensible in his scheme for combining tree-life and ground-life,—one for safety, the other for food.

"But no matter how much he may romp about the fields during the day, high-holder lives up to his name at bedtime, finding some vertical perch on which he couches upright, with his stiff tail for a brace and his shoulders for a pillow. I once caught a flicker asleep in a hollow tree, one that was split for several feet up the trunk and had weathered into a cozy cavity. It was a winter day, just after a soft, heavy snow, and as flicker abhors wading in it, he was spending the day sensibly snoozing. But sound asleep, too, so that he didn't know I was anywhere about until I touched him with the tip of a stick.

"My, what a startled bird he was! He gave a loud yelp and was off almost before he had his eyes open. He sky-rocketed into a tall tree, and there ran over his big vocabulary of uncomplimentary epithets. He reminded me of an angry Chinaman jabbering pidgin-English.

"He should be a native of China or Japan, anyway, he has such an Oriental look, with his gay yellow and black striped and dotted robe, his red nape piece, his black necklace, his white obi-sash bow at the back, and most

of all his drooping, slender black mustaches. Also the way two of them will perch on a branch and bow and kowtow in true Eastern fashion, clattering away in a rigmarole that has the monotonous sing-song of Chinese music. Flicker is a character, to be sure."

XLV

JUNCO DAYS

On a soft, hazy, cobwebby October afternoon we were motoring along a shady country by-road, one of our favorite drives, and a lovely one, too, bordered with evergreens and deciduous trees mixed in pleasing proportions, and carpeted with underbrush and tall herbs. It is one of Jack Frost's chosen nooks, where he can splash color to his heart's content, yellow on the poplars, mountain-ashes, wild cherries, moosewoods, and birches; scarlet and orange on the sumacs, maples, dogwoods; russet on the ferns and scrub-oaks.

But Jack Frost was not alone that day. For there were companies of little gray-robed birds flitting about the underbrush. They had the air of newly arrived tenants as in and out they darted, taking possession of their winter quarters.

It was a junco family, or black snowbirds. And, judging from the stir they made, there was an immense flock of them. For, as we drove along, the sound of our coming flushed new birds constantly; and the whir of their wings was as incessant as the click of grasshoppers when one walks through a July meadow. Where they flew didn't seem to matter much, just so they showed concern over our puffing presence. Some dashed from the edge of the wood inward; others whisked from the

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

SLATE-COLORED JUNCO

underbrush out where they could see their disturbers. Some scudded from left to right across the road ahead of the car; others scurried from right to left. Occasionally one would flit along in front of the car, looking over its shoulder as it swerved and curved from side to side, like a dog running a race with a car.

But whichever way they went there was the family flight, a sort of aimless flitting away, with a flirt of the tail and a flash of the snow-white feathers on each side of the wide-spread fan that is the bird's distinguishing mark. For the junco is one bird that has no qualms about "showing the white feather"; indeed, the members of the tribe are inordinately proud of these hind decorations, and never take flight without displaying them. And it is by his white tail feathers that you will know the black snowbird. It is his "follow-me" signal, a call to other juncos to take wing with him.

But, should you desire further description, remember he goes dressed in blue-gray, or slate-black, with the appearance of a fine crape cape over a white smock, except on the breast and the throat, where the white shows in the form of a vest.

Also remember his grasshopper-like flights, of which he is so fond. When a family of them is about the underbrush, their wings keep up a constant clicking and clacking, like so many grasshoppers flinging their bodies against the air. B-z-z-z-z-z! B-z-z-z-z-z! they go, first one side of you and then on the other, with a peculiar metallic whisk of their wings. And for all their fuss they fly so short a distance that they seem more like mechanical birds than real ones.

For junco is never much alarmed over passers-by, and there is but little show of fear in his taking wing. It seems more like a companionable sallying forth to go a piece down the road with you, as the farmer's dog is fond of accompanying traffic. Junco is really a very gentle, trusting, affectionate little bird; and, though he doesn't come into town and seek you out, if you appear in his haunts, he makes you right at home, joins you for a twittering chat, welcomes your arrival, entertains you while you remain, and speeds you on your way when you become a parting guest.

"A little band of snowbirds twitter here,
And fly before us in a shy amaze,"

observes one poet, which describes perfectly the junco's busybody ways.

To be sure, as another poet has discovered,

"The tip of his small tail may be
A snow-storm in epitome"
(William H. Hayne),

a herold sent on in advance. And on a gay October day one can hail with real pleasure the appearance of the black snowbird just arrived from the north as one of the first forerunners of winter. Winter is bound to come, whether junco comes or not. So why not greet him, knowing he will add charm to the season? And since he will remain all winter, no matter how furiously the storms may rage, we cannot begrudge him a few weeks of revel in this autumn glory. He is a faithful companion of Jack Frost, the true child of winter, a lover of ice and snow and cold.

"Hark! don't you hear a gladsome song,
A merry chirp from a tiny throat?
The snowbird all the winter long
Will cheer us with his happy note,"

says Dora Read Goodale, recounting this new arrival with "what is left" at the end of the summer. Which is true, for, the first of the winter birds to come down from the northern nesting-regions the tribe prefers, junco remains about a month in the spring after the less hardy birds have begun to arrive from the south. As John B. Tabb records,

"When snow, like silence visible,
Hath hushed the summer bird,
Thy voice, a never-frozen rill,
Of melody is heard.
But when from winter's lethargy
The buds begin to blow,
Thy voice is mute, and suddenly
Thou vanishest like snow."
—*"The Snowbird."*

Though, unlike the tree-sparrow, one of the common snowbirds of the northern woods, the black snowbird usually takes the elements more seriously. Tree-sparrow delights to frolic in the snow, tumbling and rolling in it like a child. Junco sometimes plays with the snow when it is falling in big soft flakes.

"All day the dark-winged flock
About my window hopping, chirping, come;
They frolic in the snow;
They dance with the white flakes;
And every small foot makes
In the pure covering its tiny track,
While stars and spangles deck each little back."
—*Augusta Moore.*

But usually, when a junco is flushed from a drift, it has been surprised at a feast of weed-seeds or dogwood-berries. For when in search of food junco will dare many things, diving into deep banks to reach snow-covered tidbits, or even coming close to a cabin or a farmer's barnyard when other resources fail.

A cold, snappy January day or a soft, melting February one, whichever you choose for a winter wood stroll, you will find the junco astir, a trim, wide-awake little fay of the forest. And how companionable a mite, too, with its air of childlike curiosity, alert, sprightly, interested in you, yet not over-reckless, willing to share the scene with you, but ready to fly if you appear threatening.

Some one has termed them "merry juncos," and rightly, for the very flutter and whisk of their wings have a joyous sound. They are not merely flying to go somewhere,—those short scurries never take them far,—but fly for sheer pleasure. When the birds arrive in the fall, because of either fatigue or the novelty of their surroundings, they are quiet. The whir of their wings is their chief autumn song.

But upon entering a winter wood you will hear their happy trills from many a hidden nook. Perhaps you will discover a songster on a branch, singing in the snow. Perhaps it will be a couple of birds, or a small flock of them, playing tag about the snowy branches and laughing over their sport. Perhaps it will be a thankful mite, perched on a weed-stem, eating seeds and twittering his gratitude between bites. Surely it was a junco that Bryant discovered when he tells us in "A Winter Piece" that "the snowbird twittered on the beechen bough."

Sometimes, though, you hear bird voices you cannot locate, you hear more songs than you see songsters; in that case move slowly or not at all, and sooner or later the curious little mites will spy you out and come to investigate.

About sunset is a good time to be in a winter wood if you would enjoy a junco concert. I recall such a pleasant incident. We had driven out several miles to get Christmas trees, and were returning with little spruces hung all about the car, yet not one to spare. The sun was low, and danced behind the leafless poplars and birches and among the green pines like a great orange ball rolling along behind a picket fence. While it was still above the horizon, dusky shadows began creeping across the road and through the woods. Suddenly a little spruce we thought securely wedged in between hood and fender tumbled off, and we stopped to get it. While we waited, we heard a soft twittering in the trees on either side of the road, a sort of chant or evening hymn, now loud, now soft, as in antiphon. A little searching discovered the songsters to the detriment of the chorus, for upon our approaching the trees, white tail-feathers began flashing before our eyes.

The junco's quaint little head may not seem to have much brain-space, but he is a wise being for all that. He knows what to trust and what to distrust. He will follow you if you go quietly about your business, and will frankly take pleasure in your presence, flitting along ahead of you, darting among the branches, flashing a signal of white feathers gaily in front of your eyes, as if twitting you over your slowness.

But if you make any suspicious motions, even if you stop still and just watch them, juncos become nervous to the point of disappearing from your sight, while, should a crow or a hawk squawk past, what a scamper there will be for the sheltering undergrowth! No lingering for curiosity's sake then; juncos seem to be well informed as to what these marauders will do if they get the chance.

I remember one February day watching some juncos dart among the rails of a rustic park fence. In their blue-gray coats and white vests they resemble mice dodging in and out. There was some of the mouse's furtive curiosity and fear combined in the way they frisked about. But at a loud cry near by, where a blue jay sat on a limb overlooking the clearing, there was a frightened scramble from that fence, while the twitters turned to alarmed squeaks as the shadow of a hawk passed over the snow. Mice running from a cat could not disappear more quickly or more utterly.

XLVI

A QUICK DISAPPEARANCE

"QUAIL on toast!" commented the surveyor appreciatively, as we sat down to a feast his wife had prepared for us. "Well, reverse them—put the toast on the quail—and you could fancy they were hiding from our hungry appetites, just as I've seen the birds do in the woods, many a time."

"By creeping under leaves, and grass, I suppose," I ventured.

"Not by merely creeping under them," he said, commencing to serve the delicious bits, "although I've often seen bob-whites doing that very thing. They have several devices for getting out of sight in time of danger, you know, such as creeping into a tussock of grass or into the weeds and underbrush, or burrowing into a pile of fallen leaves or a heap of snow. But their most interesting trick I have never seen mentioned in bird-books, and, I believe, it is not generally known to bird-lovers."

He stopped to take a bite of his bird, and to praise the cooking, until I began to fear the story would be lost, after all, when his wife prompted him:

"Well, tell her all about it. She's bursting with curiosity, and your bird will keep better than she, I'm certain."

The surveyor laughed and began:

"The first time I noticed the trick was one day, several years ago, when I was eating my lunch under a big tree on the edge of a brushy clearing I was surveying. I heard the chicken-like peep of a flock of young quails not far away, and kept still to get a sight of the family. There is no prettier one in wood or field than a covey of these roly-poly dominick chicks. Soon they came into view, and from the black necktie the old bird was wearing, and the decided colors of his speckled coat, I recognized a Father White in charge of a covey of youngsters.

"Evidently Mother White was preparing for a second incubation, and so he must care for the first brood, which he seemed to be doing with flattering success. There were nine of the little chaps, about the size of chicks just beginning to feather, already wearing the family colors of mizzled red-brown, black and buff, in the mother's dimmer shadings.

"It was a pretty sight to see the father looking out for them, showing them how to nibble grass, or scratching for them and calling them with soft 'quoi, quoi, quoi-eee!' when he turned up a tempting grub. They were working near me, and finally found a good feeding-place in and about an old decayed log not far away, where the father commenced to make the chips fly in quest of food.

"All at once he discovered me watching him. How he did I have no idea, for I had not moved. Perhaps he caught a glimpse of an unusually large toad squatted at the foot of the tree, and thought a new animal had been born to pester bob-whites. Anyway, he suddenly gave

Courtesy National Association of Audubon Societies, New York.

BOB-WHITE

a cry that sounded much like a hen's hawk-alarm, but not so loud. He did not pretend to be hurt, as I have seen Mother Quail do, and have heard of the father's doing. He spread his wings and tail and strutted up and down before his brood, like a turkey gobbler offering defiance. He stood on guard for some little time, all the while ringing his alarm note most emphatically. At last he spread his wings and went off at a great speed and whir into the thicket and out of sight.

"When all was still, it was so still one could have heard a pine needle drop. I waited for the little ones to make some sound, wondering where they could have gone so quickly. Hearing and seeing nothing of them, I went toward the log, but did not get a sign of their presence until I was right among them. Then a wild peeping broke out, and little bob-whites were springing from the ground all about my feet. They ran into the underbrush, and I heard their father calling them together with a low, comforting 'quoi-e-e-e!'

"I wondered how the little scamps could have been hiding there under my eyes, and determined to find out the secret to the minutest detail. So, a few days later, when I stirred up a family, I paid no attention to the old bird's antics, but kept my eyes glued on the youngsters. They had seemed to disappear into the very ground where there were a few old leaves. So I studied the spot without stirring. What was my surprise to find the leaves were lifted ever so slightly above the ground, as if they had stopped at full poise just before reaching the settling point.

"There were the little bob-whites, lying on their

backs, each holding a leaf in his claws in such a manner that only a careful search could make out a living bird underneath!

"That was the secret of the sudden disappearance of those rascals a few days before, I assured myself. Each had merely caught the nearest leaf in its claws, and whirled over on its back, and crouched under these sheltering umbrellas remained most effectively hidden. Only by walking among them could I be sure, even then, that my eyes saw what my mind reasoned they did see.

"From that time I was on the *qui vive* to catch the birds turning the trick. So the next time I spied a covey of young quails, feeding far enough away from the underbrush to discourage their trying to make a run to cover, I whipped out my glasses before alarming them. When I had the focus, I deliberately frightened them by mewing like a hawk.

"Like a flash, over went each little whiffet on its back, his feet holding a dead leaf, or chip, or even a clod of matted mould, close against his body. Only a whisk of something brown, which the casual eye might easily mistake for leaves stirred slightly by a gust of wind, and then everything was quiet. The little bob-whites lay there as still as mice, and not a leaf trembled. I could see them crouching there, frozen into mere clods, hardly breathing. After about ten minutes, I slipped nearer and nearer, until I was almost upon them. Then over they rolled and off they scurried out of sight into the underbrush.

"Since then I've caught bob-whites playing the trick often, even in the fall when almost full-sized. If I notice

a peculiar little flurry of leaves, when a breeze would not be likely to stir them, I study it, and am very likely to find a covey of quail lying there on their backs, holding the leaves over them—quail on toast, reversed," he laughed, and picked up his knife and fork to resume his interrupted dinner.

XLVII

"BLUE PETER"

THE coot's popular name of mud-hen never seems more appropriate than when applied to the bird in the Northwest, for there every puddle, the muddier and thicker the better, is a veritable coot paradise. He makes himself at home in every roadside ditch and pasture slough, as if he trusted man implicitly; yet to add spice to what would otherwise be a tame existence, he pretends to seem quite uneasy about the wisdom of being so trusting. Although his flesh is not coveted by any human being, he is conceited enough to think himself a tempting tidbit, and is more shy even in the off season than his edible associates, the wild ducks, which are so carelessly tame until the day the hunting season opens.

So, whenever you pass by a muddy ditch, one or more Blue Peters, and usually several, will be put in a pleased flutter at this slight attention on your part, and will immediately begin to show off. They go paddling off into the reeds, their bobbing heads nodding assent to their rowing feet that "it is just as well to get getting a move on," though their rate of speed is not so fast that you cannot get a good view of them.

In a slough of any width, where the water is too open

to permit a short swim to sheltering weeds, Blue Peter puts off with a great display of alarm, like a pullet running from a hawk. Indeed, "hen" is as happy a selection for the bird's name as "mud," since he walks and runs in the water with the same mannerisms the barnyard fowl exhibits on land.

To be in evidence as much as possible, when Peter starts to fly up out of the water, he first spreads his smoky-blue wings, stretches his legs to their full length, and goes running along on the surface for a few feet,—the origin, doubtless, of his name "Peter," just as the Petrel is "Little Peter," in honor of the disciple who walked on the Sea of Gennesareth. Blue Peter splatters along, noisily and showily, with much the effect of a skipping stone.

When he leaves the water, he flies rapidly a short distance, then falls back quite out of breath, and plainly disappointed that you have made no move to follow him. Indeed, the loud, squawky "kruk, kruk!" with which he takes wing, might be construed as an invitation to pursue the white "follow-me" patch decorating him astern and always on exhibition even when he is not on the wing. His "kruk, kruk!" upon alighting seems to be mingled surprise and disgust that such a fine bird has been allowed to escape.

There's no denying it, Blue Peter is conceited. He often sits on the water, backing with both feet, thus tilting his body forward and up to parade the snowy white patch on the seat of his trousers. To win a coy mate, or to charm one who has become somewhat indifferent, he will stretch his neck, partly lift his wings, and spread

his tail before her. He not only apes the hen, but aspires higher and tries to make himself a swan, and will often be discovered putting on swan airs, swimming along with head lowered, beak almost touching the water, and wings lifted behind.

He is proud, too, of his waxy white beak, always keeping its reflection bobbing just beside him. He is proud with reason, for it gleams against the midnight-blue of his breast like a bright morning star. Going or coming, he keeps it twinkling both above and below the surface of the water. Though mud be his chosen element, and his coat is a good blue gumbo shade, those trimmings on bow and stern meant to be white are always immaculately snowy and shining.

That he may be seen at all times, he takes good care to be as noisy as possible, splashing and kruking at whatever he does. His inability to make a clean getaway from the water, or a neat drop into it, makes him known as the "splatterer." His plan of running over the water with a great splashing has been adopted by mallards and other edible ducks, as a protective measure, since the hunter would not be wasting his precious bullets on a mere coot, or any bird he took for a coot.

"Just look at them go!" laughed my friend the pioneer, as we went dashing by a roadside slough, scattering coots like silver-tipped thunderclouds. "But I've seen flocks that didn't scatter," he chuckled reminiscently.

"Tell me," I urged.

"They get the ice going and coming, in April and November, and I've seen Peters skating on half-frozen

sloughs both in early spring and late fall. It's a funny sight. A coot will light on the ice as though he thought it water, and instead of dropping down into it, as he expects to do, or even stopping where he lands, he'll slide along like a schoolboy learning to skate. Or rather, like a timid old man on an icy pavement, all flounder and flop, trying to keep his balance, with unexpected slides and spins from one side to the other.

"Then, maybe, when Peter thinks he's going to be able to stop without falling, a foot will slip out from under him and down he goes, sprawling with wings out. But he's a plucky fellow, and manages to get up at last, though without any confidence, for he stands scrooched up, afraid to move for fear of tumbling. If there's a wind Peter generally ends his skate by blowing off into the water, or the reeds, where he is more at home.

"I've often wondered why he doesn't get off the ice and into the air, as soon as he finds himself sliding. Probably he misses the splash of water and doesn't know how to rise without it. Anyway, he keeps on trying to get up on his wings by taking a short run first, and it's comical as can be to watch him. Finally, though, if he doesn't blow into the water, he will crouch down and crawl gingerly along to the edge of the ice and slide in with a grunt of relief. In unfrozen spots, the slough will be black with them, and I've seen a fringe of them roosting on the edge of an icy pond, waiting for a chance to slip into the water.

"I've studied Peter in all stages, and he is always an odd and interesting bird. In the early days, when the sloughs were more plentiful than they are now, coots

kept the whole country in an uproar with their courting serenades. In the spring they are more noisy than other times, and keep up a constant cackling and screeching. Before sunup and after sunset particularly, they used to make the sloughs ring with their 'Co-o-o-o-o—coo-coo-coo-coo!'"

He imitated the bird's cry by prolonging the first note high and shrill, then adding the others in an accelerated lower tone.

"I've watched Madame Peter build her nest,—she's real clever at it. First she tramps down reeds and sedges and flags to make the foundation, and is mighty cute about it, too. She'll swim against a stem and press it until she bends or breaks it, even climbs on it and perches there, to bend it over. Then she half-swims, half-crawls on it until it will stay down on top of the water. Then another reed is bent down, and another, and another, criss-crossed together, until she has a good foundation for the nest. It's a bushel more or less of coarse stems and leaves, when she gets it done, and is built four or five inches above the water, with a good brim to keep the eggs in. It always slopes off like the mouth of a pitcher on one side, for a doorway, and that is where she crawls in and out. The crib is lined with fine grass, and usually there is spring enough in the foundation reeds to hold it up so it rocks up and down.

"When the brooding is on, she is still quite a gad-about, starting up from her nest to go spluttering off through the reeds to open water, for a swim and a cackle with her mates. As for Peter himself, he is good at

guarding the nest and at helping care for the dozen or more Peterkins when they arrive.

"Little coots are cute birds, covered with reddish-yellow down and decorated with red bills. As they feather out, they grow darker, and are odd sights while half-grown, as the down sticks through their plumage everywhere, making them marbled brown and blue. As soon as they can tumble out of the nest, the youngsters are led to the border of a mud-flat and there taught to pick up food from the slime. By the time they learn to dive for their food, they are feathered out and resemble the old birds. Come out some time in June, and I'll show you all the young coots you want to see.

"Little Peters soon learn to swim and dive; I've seen them hatch one day and be swimming the next. Sometimes day-old coots will go down out of sight at the danger signal, though more frequently they flock toward the parent nearest them, and dive under its wings like so many chickens under the old hen. And there's plenty of reason for them to run, with hawks above and turtles below on the lookout for young coot for dinner.

"Mud-hens aren't so bad, after all, if you just don't bother to try to eat them," he ended with an indulgent laugh, nodding to a pair in the ditch that were keeping an eye on us as they paddled leisurely into the reeds.

NOTES ON BIRDS MENTIONED IN THIS BOOK

The Cardinal ranges normally east of the Plains from southeastern South Dakota to northern Indiana and the southern part of the Hudson Valley south to the Gulf States. Usually considered a southern bird it is becoming more and more common during the summer in states north of Virginia, especially in Ohio.

The Cedar Waxwing inhabits all temperate North America, breeding from the central United States to southern Canada in wooded places; and winters in most of the United States and thence southward to Panama.

The Ruby-throated Humming-bird is found in summer throughout the eastern United States from Florida to Nova Scotia, and winters in Mexico and Central America.

The Meadowlark breeds throughout the United States, in southern Ontario and northwestward to the Saskatchewan Valley, and it winters wherever cold and snowfall are not severe.

The Shrike ranges throughout northern North America, and is to be found south in winter to the middle portion of the United States.

The Tree Sparrow breeds in the Central Canadian Provinces and winters from south Minnesota and the Maritime Provinces south to Oklahoma and South Carolina.

The Grosbeak ranges throughout eastern North America from southern Canada to Panama.

The home of the Marsh hawk extends over substantially

the whole of North America. It winters southward from Iowa, the Ohio Valley and southern New York in the east to Cuba, the Bahamas and Colombia.

The Spoonbill or Shoveler Duck is a bird common in the Northern Hemisphere, usually found in the interior, and winters from southern Illinois and Virginia southward to northern South America.

The Robin ranges throughout North America from the southern end of the Mexican table-land to the limit of trees in Labrador and thence to Alaska.

The Song Sparrow is to be found throughout North America from the Fur Countries to the Gulf States. It winters from southern Illinois and Massachusetts to the Gulf.

The Chickadee is resident throughout the northeastern United States and southeastern Canada.

The Kingbird is found in summer and breeds throughout the whole United States and southern Canada and winters in Central America and southward to northern Brazil.

The Goldfinch ranges throughout eastern North America, wintering from southern Ontario southward to the Gulf Coast.

The Woodpecker is resident in all the wooded parts of the United States and Canada, but most of the individuals move somewhat southward in winter from the northern border of their specific range.

The Screech Owl in its various sub-species occurs over much of temperate North America extending from southern British Columbia to northern Mexico.

The Ruffed Grouse ranges from the southern Alleghanies, Kansas and Colorado to Alaska, central Quebec and Nova Scotia.

The House Wren is to be found in summer throughout temperate North America and in winter in Mexico.

The Barn Swallow ranges in summer over all North

America south of western Alaska, Hudson Bay and Labrador. It winters in the tropics.

The Least Bittern ranges over a large part of North America, being found in summer from Oregon southward throughout the United States, West Indies, central and northern South America. When winter comes the birds in Canada and the United States fly southward and none are known to pass the winter north of the region immediately bordering the Gulf Coast.

The Loon inhabits the northern part of the Northern Hemisphere, and in America breeds throughout the mainland of Alaska, on islands of the Arctic Sea, in Greenland and throughout Canada and the northern part of the United States.

The Mallard Duck ranges throughout all North America, especially west of the Alleghanies, and in winter retires south of the line of frozen ponds and streams.

The Killdeer is to be found in the summer throughout southern Canada, all of the United States and north central Mexico and winters from the southwestern United States to Venezuela and Peru.

The House Sparrow, originally a native of western Europe, now is a most cosmopolitan bird, being found wherever it has a chance to get a living in its accustomed way.

The Spotted Sandpiper ranges over the whole continent; it winters from the Gulf States to southern Brazil.

The Purple Grackle ranges throughout the eastern United States from Massachusetts to the Gulf of Mexico.

The Red-winged Blackbird ranges throughout North America east of the Great Plains except the Gulf Coast and Florida. It winters south of the Ohio and Delaware Valleys.

The Mourning Dove breeds in all the southern Canadian Provinces and thence southward throughout the United States

and Mexico. In winter it is to be found from Oregon, Ohio and North Carolina southward to Panama.

The Bluebird ranges throughout the eastern United States and breeds throughout this area.

The Baltimore Oriole is to be found in eastern North America and northern South America. It winters from southern Mexico throughout Central America and Colombia.

The Whippoorwill is found in eastern North America, breeding from the St. Lawrence Valley and Nova Scotia south to northern Georgia and Louisiana. It winters from the south Atlantic and Gulf Coast to British Honduras.

The Nuthatch ranges over all temperate North America. Five geographical races of this bird are recognized by scientists.

The Flicker is found in eastern North America from the coast to the Gulf of Mexico northward through the United States and Canada until the tree limit is reached.

The common Junco, with which most people are acquainted, is the slate-colored Junco. No less than eight of the subspecies have been described. Its usual range is throughout North America. It is not common in warm latitudes.

The Bob-White is now distributed over almost the whole of the United States, and extends its range westward along lines of railroad and settlements.

The Coot ranges through North America at large from Greenland and Alaska to the West Indies and Central America, nesting throughout this range but more rarely on the Atlantic Coast.